Paun Es Durlić

THE LAST BREATH OF A DYING LANGUAGE

The Story of the Disappearance of an Ancient Ethnic Community from the Soil of Contemporary Europe

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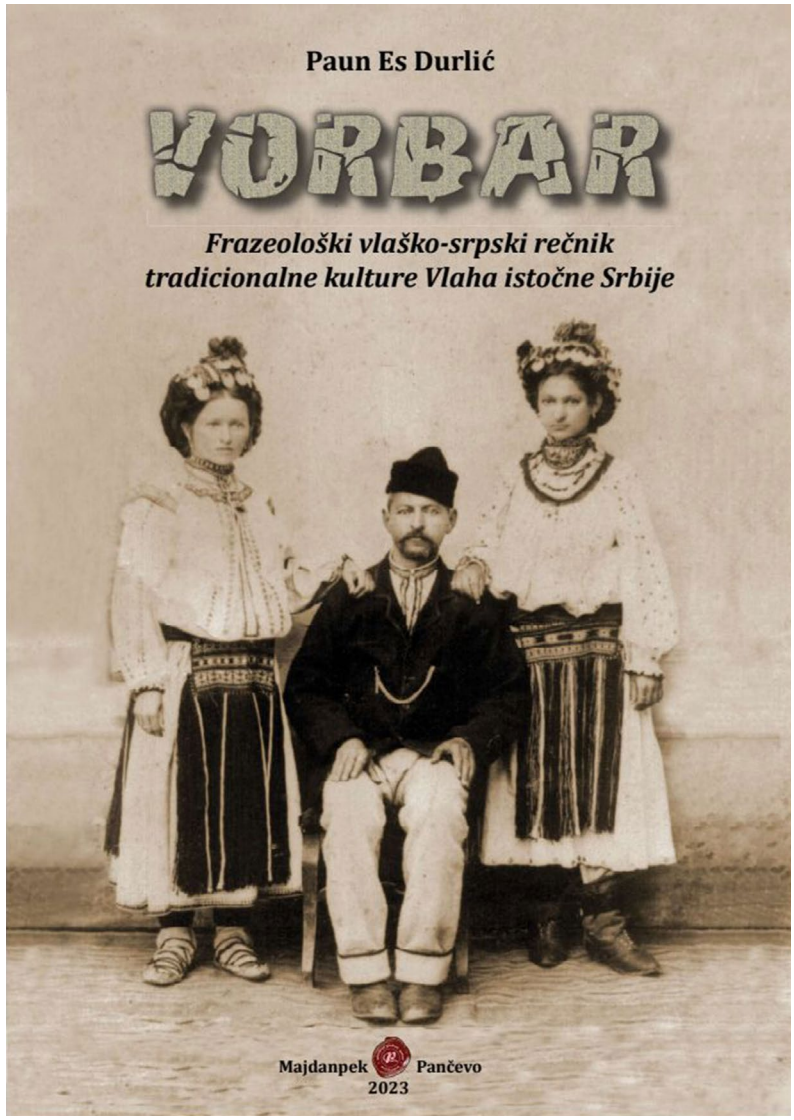

Editor's Note

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Photo on the cover of the book: Paun Es Durlić, Old Vlach, 1978

Paun Es Durlić

THE LAST BREATH OF A DYING LANGUAGE

An Introduction to

VORBAR – A VLACH–SERBIAN PHRASEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY
OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF THE VLACHS OF EASTERN SERBIA

English translation prepared
with the assistance of ChatGPT (OpenAI)

Pančevo 2026

For Annemarie

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THE LAST BREATH OF A DYING LANGUAGE

ABSTRACT: This study serves as the introduction to Vorbar: A Vlach–Serbian Phraseological Dictionary of the Traditional Culture of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia. At the same time, it represents an attempt to explain, through the example of a small Balkan community, the general mechanisms underlying the emergence, development, and disappearance of ethnic communities in Europe.

Drawing upon extensive ethnographic material, historical sources, and several decades of field research, the author re-examines established interpretations concerning the origin and identity of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia, their migrations from the Carpathian region, the role of state borders in migration processes, and the relationship between traditional economy, existential consciousness, and ethnic identity. Particular attention is devoted to a critical analysis of influential theories advanced by Serbian and Romanian historiography and ethnology that shaped both the scholarly and political perception of the Vlachs throughout the twentieth century.

The central thesis of the study is that, in the case of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia, language is not the first but the last component of ethnic identity to disappear. Traditional modes of subsistence, social organization, material culture, customs, and other markers of ethnic distinctiveness had already undergone profound transformation under the influence of modernization, industrialization, and centuries of life within the Serbian state. Consequently, the disappearance of the Vlach language should be understood not as the cause, but as the final stage of a much longer process of ethnic transformation. In this respect, the study challenges the widely accepted assumption that language loss, in itself, brings about the disappearance of an ethnic community.

At the same time, the study raises broader methodological questions concerning the relationship between historical reality, national ideologies, and scholarly interpretations, demonstrating that academic constructs may themselves become active factors in the very social processes they seek to explain. The history of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia is thus presented as a European example of gradual ethnic assimilation brought about not by violent disruption or forced displacement, but by the long-term interaction of economic, political, and cultural forces.

In this context, Vorbar is more than a dictionary of an endangered language. It is a documentary record of the final stage in the existence of a traditional European culture, preserved at the very moment when its last surviving bearer of ethnic identity—its native language—is irreversibly disappearing.

Keywords: ethnology; Vlachs; Romanians; Eastern Serbia; ethnic identity; existential consciousness; ethnic assimilation; language loss; traditional culture; ethnogenesis.

***Author's Note Vorbar**: A Vlach–Serbian Phraseological Dictionary of the Traditional Culture of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia was published in Serbian in 2023. Among its readers, the book received an exceptionally positive reception, and the author received numerous private letters and personal comments describing it as an outstanding, even seminal, contribution to the study of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia. At the same time, however, it has received almost no attention in the scholarly literature.*

The author believes that one possible reason lies in the fact that this study challenges a number of long-established interpretations concerning the origin, ethnogenesis, and ethnic identity of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia that have been accepted and repeatedly reproduced in Serbian scholarship for more than a century. For similar reasons, the book has likewise remained almost unnoticed in Romanian academic and public discourse, where it also critically re-examines certain assumptions that have long been regarded as self-evident.

With the aim of making the results of this research accessible to the widest possible international scholarly audience, the author has prepared this English edition of the introductory study with the assistance of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence language model developed by OpenAI, used solely as a linguistic tool for translation and stylistic refinement of the English text. All scholarly hypotheses, interpretations, arguments, and conclusions presented in this work are exclusively those of the author.

This edition is intended primarily for the international academic community, enabling scholars to evaluate directly the methodology, sources, argumentation, and conclusions of the study independently of its reception and interpretation within Serbian and Romanian scholarly circles.

General Remarks

In a complex bilingual work such as *Vorbar*, it is not enough for the dictionary entries alone to be explained with precision. Equally important are those key concepts that sustain the book as a whole and clarify its purpose and intent, whether they are explicitly expressed in the text and commentaries or exist only as part of the author's perspective, woven into the very core of the work and permeating its entire structure. For this reason, the opening section of this introduction is devoted to the explanation of such concepts. At the same time, the reader should be aware that neither ethnology nor the related disciplines have encountered another case comparable to that of the Vlachs in terms of ethno-historical destiny. This uniqueness requires that its fundamental causes be examined, so that it may ultimately become clear why the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia have reached a point at which their assimilation into the Serbian population has become an irreversible process. When that process is finally complete, a book such as *Vorbar* should remain behind, if only as a memorial to their existence.

On the Term "Vlach", with a Brief History of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia

The discussion must begin with the ethnonym *Vlach*, a word believed to have been adopted by the Slavs from Balkan Gothic (Skok 1971: 608) and subsequently spread as a collective designation for the Romanized populations they encountered upon their settlement in the Balkans. Just as the term Slav serves as an umbrella name for various Slavic peoples, so the term *Vlach* came to function as a collective designation for various Romance-speaking peoples. However, whereas the ethnonym *Slav* links populations of common ethnic origin, Vlach denotes a variety of peoples who may have shared little more than a distant Indo-European ancestry, not to mention the terminological confusion that arose when, over time, the word lost its capital letter and ceased to denote an ethnic group, becoming instead a designation for a pastoral occupation.[1)] Consequently, this ethnonym is of little help in solving the "squaring of the circle" posed by our Vlachs; on the contrary, it seems only to obscure the issue further. To illuminate the subject fully, an analysis of surgical precision is required, since it concerns the very foundations of ethnogenesis, from which an answer is expected to the sensitive question of ethnic origin and national affiliation. This is not merely a matter of scholarly interest but also a political issue, as it bears directly upon the legal status of the Vlachs as a national minority that is evidently disappearing. This question, together with several other issues essential to understanding both the emergence of

1) The absurdity of regarding all Balkan groups that, following the collapse of the Roman Empire, came to bear the Slavic designation *Vlach* (*Vlachs*) as ethnically related can best be illustrated by the example of the relatively small region of northern Dalmatia. Researchers have found that its Vlach populations "at different times, and even at the same time, were neither of the same ethnic origin nor of the same religion, nor did they arrive in northern Dalmatia from the same direction or at the same time" (Hrabak 2003: 199). The same holds true for the Vlachs everywhere, regardless of which regional case we examine. In this text, as well as throughout *Vorbar*, the term *Vlach* is used as an ethnic designation for those inhabitants of Eastern Serbia who have identified themselves as such in the Serbian language from the moment they first set foot on its soil down to the present day, when that identification is based on a consciousness of national belonging. They also referred to themselves as Vlachs in Serbian during the period when the Serbian administration, relying solely on linguistic criteria, officially registered them as Romanians. Why they cannot today be described as Romanians in an objective scholarly text written in Serbian—least of all by means of hybrid and often pejorative constructions such as *Vlach/Romanian* and the like—will be explained later.

the Vlachs and the forces driving their gradual disappearance—questions to which scholarship has provided no clear answers but has often only further obscured—lies beyond both the scope of this introduction and the purpose of Vorbar. They will therefore be addressed elsewhere in a more appropriate context.

If one starts from the assumption that the names of the peoples we encounter throughout the world today are closely linked to the names of their national states—or, more precisely, that the names of those states were derived from the names of the peoples themselves—it is obvious that Bulgarians come from *Bulgaria*, Greeks from *Greece*, Albanians from *Albania*, Hungarians from *Hungary*, and Serbs from *Serbia*. But where do the Vlachs come from, when there is no country called Wallachia today? The answer is simple: *Wallachia no longer exists, but it did exist in the past*. It occupied the southern Danubian region of present-day Romania, which is its legal and political successor. Our Eastern Vlachs originate directly from that region, while the Central and Western Vlachs come from territories north of the Danube whose inhabitants regarded the Principality of Wallachia as their motherland, to whose people they organically belonged.[2)] This further means that the Vlachs migrated from these regions before Wallachia, under the Constitution of 1866, changed its name to Romania (Rom. *România*), while at the same time slightly modifying the traditional ethnonym *rumân* into *román* in accordance with the new name of the state

That significant change had little impact in Serbia. The Vlachs themselves knew nothing about it, since they had no contact whatsoever with their former homeland, and many no longer cared about it. Given the circumstances that had forced them to leave, life in the old country inspired forgetfulness far more readily than nostalgia. Moreover, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Vlachs in Serbia had only limited contact not only with the wider world around them but even with what might be called the broader social community. Serbia was sparsely populated, mountain dwellings dug into the ground were scattered and isolated,[3)] people were occupied day and night with the struggle for survival, and the farthest most ever travelled was "to the neighboring village fair" or to the district town (oraș) when summoned by the court.[4)] Travel to more distant places required a passport, and most people never had any need for one. The Serbs themselves paid even less attention to developments in the neighboring principality. All of this contributed to the preservation of the term *Vlach* in the Serbian language down to the present day as the designation for the inhabitants of Eastern Serbia whose ancestors had migrated from the Principality of Wallachia or its surrounding regions, even though Wallachia itself long ago disappeared from the political map.[5)]

2) The classification of the Vlachs into Eastern, Central, and Western groups was initially formulated as a working hypothesis in the *Vorbar* project. By the end of the project, however, it had proven both meaningful and analytically valid. See Maps 1 and 4 in the Appendix.

3) In the village of Gornjane, in the Porečka Reka region, I recorded during the 1980s a local recollection that „in former times the houses were so scattered and so few in number that one had to travel for hours if one wanted to find someone to talk to."

4) The extent to which the Vlachs remained unintegrated into Serbian society during the nineteenth century, despite nearly two centuries of living side by side, is illustrated by the following story, which was told to me by my mother, Gergina. Sometime in the 1880s, a neighbor of hers from the Balonja family received, through a village constable, an oral summons ordering him to appear on a certain day at the village "office." Unable to imagine why the authorities might be calling for him, he grew increasingly anxious over the following days. Finally, he secretly bathed, shaved, dressed himself in his best clothes, took a rope, and went into a nearby forest, where he was later found hanged.

5) After the Congress of Berlin (1878), at which Serbia—along with Romania and Montenegro—was recognized as an independent state on the condition that it "secure equal civil and religious rights for all" (Oakes 1918: 350), state statistics and the ecclesiastical administration began recording Romanian instead of Vlach in the category of "nationality." In the actual lives of the Vlachs, however, nothing changed, either politically or in any other respect. It should be emphasized that the Vlachs of that period were almost entirely illiterate, while their knowledge of Serbian—if they possessed any at all—was generally rudimentary. The change of ethnonym remai-

However, this principality was called *Wallachia* by foreigners, above all by the Slavic peoples who surrounded it on almost every side. The Vlachs themselves referred to themselves in their own language as Rumîn, and to their principality as Ţara rumănească (**Цѫрꙗ рꙋмъньскъ**), which literally means "the Romanian Land."[6] The memory of the old homeland survived for a long time among the Vlachs of Serbia, who traditionally raised a toast at family patron-saint celebrations, saying: Să traĭaskă Ţara rumîńaskă! ("*Long live the Romanian Land!*"). The endonym Rumîn, by which the Vlachs of present-day Serbia identify themselves, and român, by which the Romanians of Romania—as well as Romanians throughout the world—identify themselves, point to the strong Roman, or more precisely Latin, component of their ethnogenesis. The word rumân/român derives from the Latin *Romanus*, originally meaning "Roman,"[7] and preserves the memory of the colonization and Romanization of Dacia that began after its incorporation into the Roman Empire in the second century AD.

There is abundant evidence that the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia originated in Wallachia and the neighboring ethnically Vlach regions (Durlić 2020: 31-46). Consequently, it is a serious methodological error to associate the present-day Vlachs of Serbia with the so-called *Balkan Vlachs* in a geographical sense, or with the so-called *medieval Vlachs* in a historical sense. Even less convincing are the fashionable theories of continuity that take references to Vlachs in Ottoman census records as proof of such connections. The Vlachs of Eastern Serbia share no direct link with either of these groups apart from the common umbrella designation *Vlach*, which points to linguistic affinity. Yet language is only one—and perhaps the most readily visible—component in the highly complex composition of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity itself constitutes merely a lower level of national identity, within which lie the elements that are decisive in the formation of national consciousness.

Turkish Vlachs and Balkan Vlachs

About the Vlachs mentioned in the Ottoman censuses of Eastern Serbia, whom the proponents of autochthonous origin theories frequently invoke, three basic facts should be borne in mind. First, the Ottomans did not find these Vlachs in situ; rather, they brought them from various regions they had previously conquered and settled them, granting them various privileges, in the frontier zones of newly conquered territories (Miljković-Krstić

ned confined to the sphere of Serbian administration. The Vlachs themselves knew nothing about it, since no one informed them of the change; and even had they been informed, it is difficult to see how such an administrative technicality could have awakened a Romanian national consciousness among them. This situation persisted until after the Second World War, when the old official designation, Vlach, was restored for reasons of a complex nature that will be explained later. The Vlachs, being illiterate or only barely literate, possessed no political organization of their own. The only attempt made during the nineteenth century to raise before the National Assembly the question of certain minority rights—such as schooling and church services in their mother tongue—ended dramatically. The minister responsible, Garašanin, reportedly pressed a pistol to the forehead of the deputy who had submitted the interpellation and forced him to withdraw "the foolish interpellation" lest he be shot on the spot as an agitator of "Romanian propaganda." The unfortunate "interpellator" was Jovan Popović, a coffeehouse owner from Mihajlovac and a member of the National Assembly (Đokić 1934: 381).

6) According to the earliest known attestation in the so-called Neacşu's Letter of 1521, written in the Church Slavonic script.

7) An important linguistic feature should be noted here. In the speech of the Romanized Dacians, the Latin vowel o occurring between two consonants frequently changed into u. Thus, the Latin ethnonym *Romanus* was adapted as *rumân*; Latin nomen became nume; dolor (dolorem) evolved into durere; and colore into culoare, among many other examples (Câmpean 2017: 4). It appears, however, that this phonetic development did not necessarily originate in Dacia itself. It may have been brought there by the Romans. One of the leading scholars of the Transylvanian School, Petru Maior, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century about the doublet Roman ("Roman") and Rumân ("Romanian"), drew attention to the Italian writer Tommaso Azzetti (Major 1812: 169). In his work Ortografia latina ed italiana, Azzetti refers to Pliny's testimony that certain regions of Italy "did not possess the letter O" (non avevano la lettera O) and regularly replaced it with u, as was the case in Umbria and Tuscany (Azzetti 1733: 49–51). According to Petru Maior, this explains how the **ѡмани** (Romans) eventually became **ꙋмани**, (Romanians) (Major 1812: 170).

2007: 48.).[8] Second, when those frontiers shifted, these populations lost their "Vlach privileges" and moved further west themselves, "in search of new borderlands"(Ibid: 63; Miljković-Bojanić 2004: 239.) Third—and most importantly—by the time the Ottomans resettled them, they had already undergone extensive Serbianization, while their status had ceased to be primarily ethnic and had become a social category as early as the period of the Nemanjić dynasty (Miljković-Bojanić 2004: ibid; Bojanić-Lukač 1969: 85-86; Veljković 1986: 62). That these migrations and subsequent resettlements disrupted the ethnic continuity of the Vlachs within the territory of present-day Serbia is per se notum—self-evident. Finally, the "Ottoman" Vlachs were genetically affiliated with the Balkan Vlachs rather than with the Carpathian Vlachs, to whom the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia belong.

The Balkan Vlachs differ fundamentally from the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia in their economic system, and economy may be regarded as the queen of existential consciousness, while existential consciousness itself is the queen of all forms of consciousness. The way in which people secure their livelihood, together with the environment in which they do so, largely determines how they understand their lives and interpret the world around them. The crucial difference is that the Balkan Vlachs belonged to a system of transhumant pastoralism, whereas the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia practiced a form of local mountain husbandry known as bačija pastoralism. The distinction is enormous. *Transhumant pastoralism* is a highly specific form of traditional economy that can exist only in certain geographical regions of the Balkans and nowhere else on the peninsula. These are areas where vast herds can graze both in summer and in winter. Such conditions are provided by the Dinaric–Šar–Pindus mountain barrier, which lies sufficiently close to the Adriatic and Ionian Seas to provide winter grazing grounds along the narrow coastal belt, while at the same time possessing mountain ranges of sufficient altitude to ensure abundant summer pastures (Ršumović 1976: 159-160). The size of the herds sustained by this form of pastoralism was astonishing. On the summer grazing grounds they sometimes exceeded several hundred thousand head of livestock,[9] whereas even the wealthiest Vlachs of Eastern Serbia rarely owned more than a few hundred sheep. [10]The pastoral Vlachs of Eastern Serbia may, to some extent, be compared with these Balkan Vlachs, but no such comparison can reasonably be made

8) The thesis that the Vlachs of present-day Eastern Serbia are descendants of an ancient autochthonous population surviving continuously from Roman times is further contradicted by Ottoman records concerning the settlement of the region after the Turkish conquest. One passage based on primary historical sources illustrates this particularly well: "During the first phase of Vlach colonization in the Braničevo region, which lasted throughout the 1460s and 1470s, Vlachs were settled by Ottoman frontier lords in abandoned villages within their domains. Thus, by 1467, the Braničevo subaşı Ali Bey Mihaloğlu had settled Vlachs in five villages of his has estate in Zvižd, one village in Resava, and six villages of his çiftlik in Ždrelo. Soon, however, a change occurred in colonization policy. By the time of the next census in 1476, Vlachs were being settled on imperial has lands, and the taxes they paid belonged directly to the Sultan. This indicates that the repopulation of devastated areas had become one of the priorities of state policy, and that the migration routes of the Vlachs were determined primarily by military objectives" (Miljković-Krstić 2008: 293). That the Ottomans did not encounter any 'autochthonous' Vlachs who could support the theory of an uninterrupted continuity from Roman times, but instead colonized the area with Vlach groups brought from various regions, is confirmed by another finding of the same authors: "Vlachs migrated into the Smederevo Sanjak from the regions of Sjenica, Trebinje, and Nikšić; however, the main Vlach masses that settled the agricultural areas of the sanjak came from the mountainous regions of Stari Vlah and Podrinje" (ibid.: 294). A similar process took place in the Porečka River valley. After the fall of Poreč under Ottoman rule in 1524, the Turks settled groups of nomadic Vlachs in the deserted villages, bringing them "from the wilderness," that is, from mountainous regions (Stojaković 1983: 145).

9) The Vlachs of the Meglen village of Livezi, a settlement of approximately 4,000 inhabitants situated at an altitude of 1,250 metres on a plateau of Mount Paik, owned, in addition to large numbers of horses and mules used for transport, as many as 300,000 sheep and goats (Barba 1976: 22). Comparable numbers of livestock were also driven to the grazing grounds of the Dinaric mountain region (Marković 1971: 530).

10) In 1827, the sixteen Vlach villages of the Mlava Principality possessed a total of 30,931 sheep, averaging forty-four per household. The largest flock was owned by Pulja Brailov, a Vlach from Zabrega, and numbered 345 sheep (Peruničić 1980: 74).

between the predominantly agricultural Vlachs of the Krajina region and the great pastoral communities of the Balkans.

The origin of the Balkan Vlachs remains obscure and controversial, making them a subject of competing claims among the national historiographies of Romania, Greece, and Albania (Mirdita 2004: passim). During the nineteenth century, their merchant and artisan representatives, known as the Cincars (Aromanians), merged easily and rapidly with the Vlach population of Serbia. Nearly every larger Vlach village in Eastern Serbia contains at least one old family of Cincar origin. At the same time, they became fully assimilated into Serbian society, playing an important role in the emergence of its urban middle class and merchant elite.[11)] The Cincars will be discussed in greater detail later.

The Great Migration of 1690 depopulated large parts of Serbia and, owing to the significant historical hiatus that followed, brought about a profound transformation of the region's ethnic landscape, the basic features of which have been preserved to the present day.

To conclude: the cultural foundation of *Vorbar* is the culture of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia, which until the seventeenth century developed within the ethnic territory of present-day Romania, primarily in Oltenia (Little Wallachia), then in Banat — which, at the time of the migrations, was under Austrian administration — and in the Western Carpathians, at the junction of Transylvania, Banat, and Oltenia, in the region known as Ținutul Pădurenilor ("the Land of the Forest People", see Map 1). All migratory movements between these Romanian regions and the northern parts of present-day Serbia and Bulgaria were a consequence of what may be termed the law of the frontier (see Map 2).

The Law of the Frontier

The *Law of the Frontier* is a peculiar scientific paradox: it is an explanatory principle of considerable interpretative power that has meanwhile fallen almost completely into oblivion. Moreover, the authors who referred to it usually did so only in passing, as though it were a self-evident axiom requiring no further explanation (Samardžić 1990: 158). The law of the frontier is often associated with a natural boundary, since human beings, as biological creatures, are constantly moving across the land in search of food (or, in modern terms, employment), while the physical characteristics of the land—its relief, climate, and environment—define the limits within which such movements take place. The very notion of a frontier implies the existence of two distinct ethnic masses whose peripheral zones gradually intermingle over time. In its simplest formulation, the law of the frontier states that two neighbouring peoples become *ethnically intermixed along their common border*. However, when the frontier zone becomes depopulated for whatever reason, the neighbouring population expands into the vacant territory in all directions, prompting the central authorities of the host state to repopulate the area with their own population, lest the neighbour become tempted to claim it.[12)] Were it possible, even for a moment, to set aside the fact that national minorities are fundamentally a political issue—and that politics often serves to obscure rather than clarify reality—the origin of the Vlachs could be understood quite readily from the cross-border pattern of migrations between Romania and Serbia.

11) For an introductory overview of the subject within the vast body of relevant literature, see Dvorniković 1990: 237–241 and Mirdita 2004, the latter being a monographic study devoted entirely to the problem of the Balkan Vlachs.

12) The true nature of relations between neighboring countries usually comes to light in times of crisis, especially during wars. The relationship between Romania and Serbia provides a good example. In times of peace, royal marriages are arranged, churches and monasteries are built, and declarations of loyalty and friendship are exchanged. Yet when borders are redrawn in the aftermath of wars, the diplomatic gloves come off, and a behind-the-scenes struggle begins over claims to parts of a neighbor's territory, with ambitions openly displayed and few restraints placed on the means employed.

These movements are particularly evident in the region of the Wallachian Plain (see Maps 1 and 3).

In light of these circumstances, the measures undertaken by Serbia after the Second Hatt-i Sharif become readily understandable. Along with the privileges granted by this decree, Serbia also assumed responsibility for governing its own state. Once it became apparent that the proportion of subjects belonging to "foreign nationalities" was generally negligible, while the Vlach population exceeded 12 per cent of the total population—a fact evident even without consulting official statistics[13] — particular attention was drawn to the fact that the Vlachs occupied a broad and compact belt along the border with their ethnic homeland, extending from the mouth of the Timok River to the confluence of the Morava. As an initial measure, Prince Miloš ordered that newly arriving groups of refugees from Wallachia and Banat be settled "at least ten hours' travel from the banks of the Sava or the Danube" (Jagodić 2004: 27). At the same time, the territorial compactness of the Vlach population in the frontier zone was deliberately weakened through the "expansion of the Slavic element in opposition to the Romance one, which predominates in this region," notably by the settlement of Montenegrins in Petrovo Selo in 1854 and Bulgarians in the Miroč area in 1872. (Jagodić 2004: 113-116).[14] The extent to which the predominance of the Vlach element in the Krajina frontier region was regarded as a matter of state concern is further demonstrated by the *Law on the Settlement of Serbia* of 1865, which emerged precisely from such a political climate (Jagodić 2004: 74-75).

With regard to the areas where Vlachs and Serbs are found today, whether in ethnically homogeneous or mixed settlements, it should be emphasized that there is not the slightest trace of conflict between them associated with the process of settlement. This constitutes yet another indication that the earlier migrations had depopulated Serbia so extensively as to leave ample room for large numbers of new settlers. Moreover, reports that there was abundant land available for settlement in Serbia—information discreetly circulated among the peasantry of Wallachia and Banat—provided a powerful incentive for migration, whether in response to invitations from the authorities conducting colonization or from relatives who had already crossed the border and settled there.

Two Modes of Settlement: Colonization and Flight

Whereas the Vlachs of Ključ, Krajina, and the Timok region arrived from neighbouring Wallachia in accordance with the *Law of the Frontier*—that is, as individuals or in small groups crossing the Danube to escape personal hardship, legal persecution, or, most commonly, the harsh conditions of life under the boyars during the Phanariote regime—the western Vlachs, later referred to in the literature as *Ungurjani*, were settled through organized *colonization* conducted by the Austrian authorities (see Map 2). These two principal Vlach groups were neither ethnographically identical nor did they reach the territory of present-day Serbia in the same manner. The former were lowland agriculturalists, accustomed to cultivating land that they rarely owned themselves. The latter were Carpathian highlanders and pastoralists who drove before them modest flocks of sheep—small by comparison with the great herds of the Balkans, yet sufficient to ensure long-term survival. The differences between these two populations were, and remain, substantial. Indeed, scholars

13) "After the Serbs, the Romanians were the most numerous group" (Đorđević T. 1924: 90).

14) The attempt to populate the Miroč region with Bulgarians ultimately proved unsuccessful. In the years that followed, the area was gradually settled by Serbs from Golubinje and Popovica, as well as by Vlachs from Crnajka, Tanda, and Gornjane. Here too, the Vlachs eventually became the majority population: according to the census of 1884, they already accounted for 82 per cent of the inhabitants, compared with the Serbian colonists (Census 1884: 67). For the settlement of Petrovo Selo on the eastern slopes of Mount Miroč, see Stojančević, V. 1969: 86–104.

have observed that the pastoralists of two different peoples often resemble one another more closely than do the pastoralists and agriculturalists of the same people. This ancient division has accompanied these two occupations ever since the days of Cain and Abel, and their distinctive characteristics must be properly understood if we are to comprehend the worlds they created. For the effective use of *Vorbar*, particular attention should be paid to the differences in their speech, for linguistic features have proven the most enduring markers of their separate identities; time has erased much else. (See Map 4.)

The social stratum to which the ancestors of the Vlachs belonged for centuries—within which they were shaped, from which they originated, and in which the causes of their migration are to be sought—is of crucial importance for understanding the social and psychological character of the Vlachs who settled in Serbia.[15] People do not willingly move from better conditions to worse ones, but rather in the opposite direction; nor do they change their social being and traditional culture overnight. The attentive reader of *Vorbar* will find ample evidence of this throughout the book.

Who were the Vlachs who fled from Wallachia to Serbia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? The most concise and insightful answer was provided by T. Đorđević in his pamphlet *The Truth Concerning the Romanians in Serbia*, written in the context of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. From that work, we quote the following passages:

> The Romanians in Serbia are, quite simply, refugees. They fled from Romania[16] virtually destitute, bringing nothing with them, concerned only with saving their lives and preserving their honour. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Romanian peasants were serfs of the boyars. The term *robi* ("serfs," literally "slaves") was used by the Romanians themselves. The emancipation of the Romanian peasantry in the mid-nineteenth century is referred to in Romanian as *dezrobirea ţăranilor*, meaning the liberation of the peasants from servitude. [...] The fate of the Romanian peasantry on the estates of the arrogant and merciless boyars was harsh indeed. In fertile Romania, where generous nature offered abundant rewards for human labour, the peasant was little more than a beast of burden, while the entire product of his work passed into the hands of the boyars, "whose whole economic system could be summed up in

15) In all the occasions I remember from my childhood, when Vlach elders gathered together—especially around the still while rakija was being distilled—conversations about the past would inevitably turn to life in Wallachia, which they called *Rumînĭĭa*, and to the reasons for their migration to what is now Serbia. They would often mention only the name of the region where they had settled: "a veńit în Porĭeśa" ("they came to Poreč") or "a veńit în kutare şî kutare sat" ("they came to such-and-such a village"). Serbia as a state was never mentioned, since after its final fall under Ottoman rule in 1459 it had ceased to exist as such. Moreover, at the time of this colonization (see Map 2), the Carpathian part of Serbia, administered from Timişoara by the Austrian authorities, was so closely integrated with Banat that the inhabitants referred to the three Serbian districts of Ključ, Krajina, and Krivina simply as Banat (Popović D. 1955: 16; Petrović I. 1996: 30). Later, while conducting fieldwork as an ethnologist and trying to discover what notions of political and territorial relations our ancestors had when they migrated, I received some revealing answers. Informants would say: "ar veńit în pomînt bun dă viće" ("they came to a land good for livestock," Zvižd) or "a veńit în ţară unđ-a fuost pomînt pustîşag, ş-a putut să kuprindă kare kît a vrut" ("they came to a country that was largely deserted, where one could take as much land as one wished," Poreč).

16) Reading the excerpt from Đorđević's text, one should bear in mind that the Serbian scholar wrote it at the *Paris Peace Conference* in 1919, when the borders of the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were being determined, and when a national team of Yugoslav scholars was engaged in intense backstage struggles against the open Romanian aspiration toward eastern Serbia. This aspiration was based on the thesis that the Vlachs living there were part of the Romanian nation and therefore had the right to secede and unite with their mother country, Romania. The text was published in French and English, and was therefore intended exclusively for foreign readers. For that reason, it uses the name *Romania* even for periods when Romania did not yet exist, presumably because this would not have caused much confusion among its intended audience. In short, everything that the reader will find here in Đorđević's account refers to the *Principality of Wallachia* (*Ţara Românească*), particularly to the period of its history marked by the so-called *Phanariote regime* (1712–1821), which scholarship has described as one of the "most dreadful instruments of plunder known in history" (Georgescu 1972: 18). Đorđević relied on the descriptions of the Frenchman *Elias Regnault* (1801–1868), presented in his work *Histoire politique et sociale des Principautés Danubiennes* (*Political and Social History of the Danubian Principalities*), Paris, 1855. Regnault's own source for the conditions he described in Wallachia was the text *Question économique des principautés danubiennes*, written by the Romanian revolutionary and fervent anti-boyar activist *Nicolae Bălcescu* (1819–1852), renowned as a champion of land redistribution to the peasantry.

a single word—plunder." While unrestrained luxury prevailed in the palaces of the boyars, where life was one continuous pleasure, the peasants languished in extreme poverty, to such an extent that even contemporary accounts evoke both pity and indignation. "The peasants' dwellings were nothing more than burrows, called *bordei*—pits dug into the ground and roofed with planks covered by earth, rising ominously above the plain. Before long, grass would cover the earthen roofs, so that from a distance the landscape appeared gently undulating, were it not for the occasional cloud of smoke revealing the presence of human habitation. The interior was indescribable: devoid of furniture and household utensils, save for a few planks serving as beds or seats and a pot in which to cook *mămăligă*." One author writing in the early nineteenth century described the homes of Romanian peasants as "veritable troglodyte caves," while another, writing in the second half of the same century, remarked that "the hut of an African negro is better suited to the necessities of life" than the miserable dwelling of a Romanian peasant. [...] If the *ciocoi*—a term used by the peasants for the boyars, meaning "mangy cur," "mongrel," or "greedy dog"—had been able to seize the sun itself, he would have monopolized it as well, selling God's light and warmth to the peasant for money. Had the *ciocoi* been able to appropriate the waters of the sea, he would have speculated with them too, enslaving the peasant through fog, cold, and thirst, just as he had already enslaved him through hunger by taking away his land. [...] The open wound, the gangrene that caused the country to decay in times of peace no less than in times of war, was the boyar class itself. Add to this the tyranny of the Romanian princes, the lack of piety among the clergy, the crushing burdens of taxes and levies, the injustice and corruption of the courts, and other abuses of the worst kind, and you will obtain a true picture of the condition of the Romanian peasantry (Đorđević T. 2006: 18-26).

Having reached Serbia, crossing the Danube in various ways and hiding from the authorities for some time, they took possession of land through a procedure known as "ku ruptu".[17] In doing so, they carefully selected a location that would provide sufficient resources not only for themselves but also for their distant descendant. As their initial shelters, they built *śurĭaḑe* (temporary huts made of brushwood and branches), which were of exceptional importance for survival in an unfamiliar land. Unfortunately, these structures have remained virtually unknown in our scholarly literature (see *Vorbar*, entry *śurĭaḑă*).

The places where the Vlachs crossed the Danube, and the methods by which they did so, constitute ethnographic material of the highest importance which, unfortunately, has never been collected and studied as it deserves. There is even a danger that it may never come to light, under the pressure of the growing autochthonist obsession that has become almost epidemic—the notion that the Vlachs are an indigenous people who sprang from the fertile soil of Serbia *ex nihilo* and never had any connection with their ethnic kin north of the Danube. Scattered references can nevertheless be found in the literature. One example is the crossing point known as *Juc* ("river rapids") near Poreč (present-day Donji Milanovac), where, during periods of exceptionally low water levels that could fall below one meter (Dukić 1983: 3), people crossed the river on foot by stepping from one exposed rock to another, as, according to tradition, the legendary *Baba Novak*—himself born in Poreč around 1530—is said to have done. Besides Juc, through which a considerable number of the ancestors of today's Poreč Vlachs passed, another popular crossing was located in the Danube gorge near the village of Brnjica, while regular crossings with passports were made by ferry near Kladovo (see Map 1). During winter, the frozen Danube was crossed at many locations, and

17) The expression ku *ruptu* literally means "by cutting off" or "by severing," and in practice referred to the free occupation of land. The only requirement was to mark the boundaries by cutting notches into the bark of large trees, a claim that subsequent settlers generally respected. Nevertheless, genealogical memory has preserved accounts of later disputes over boundaries and land seizures, some of which even acquired an inter-village character, as in the conflict between the Vlach villages of Gornjane and Vlaole in 1835. This dispute left a substantial trace in the remarkably interesting archival records of the period (Đorđević T. 1926: 371–373). Thanks to this conflict, we possess a unique historical curiosity: *Vlaole* in the Upper Pek region is the only village in Serbia for which the exact year of foundation is known, together with the precise number of settlers, their full names and surnames, and the exact places from which each of them migrated (ibid., 373).

both swimmers and non-swimmers made use of wooden planks or gourds tied around their waists for buoyancy.

After crossing the river, the refugees hid in the mountains, living during the summer on fish and wild plant foods, and during the winter on game obtained through hunting. Ottoman authority rarely penetrated these mountainous regions, and various methods were developed by mountain villages to protect themselves from sudden incursions. In conspicuous locations visible from great distances, bundles of straw, hay, or dry brushwood were hung on trimmed tree trunks and tended by shepherds. These materials ignited easily and produced thick smoke, which served as a warning signal that Ottoman troops were approaching from a particular direction. Upon seeing the smoke, the entire village—typically small in size—would flee to the opposite side, to a refuge site prepared in advance for such emergencies. Once Serbian rule became firmly established after the departure of the Ottomans, these settlers would "legalize" their presence simply by declaring that they had been there *đin babaluk* ("since ancient times").

Once a chosen location was judged suitable for permanent settlement, a *borđiĭ* (dugout dwelling) would be excavated, and some families continued to live in such shelters until the end of the nineteenth century (see the dictionary entry *borđiĭ*).[18] The entire body of material collected and published in the book *Rumînńi în zovîrńit đi suare*, which has been described as representing "the pinnacle of the folk poetry of the Old Continent" (Durlić 2020: 341), was created and preserved in such earth dwellings. Therefore, despite the primitive nature of these habitations, their inhabitants cannot be compared to "troglodytes," that is, people of the Stone Age living in caves.

Apart from this, what they encountered upon their arrival can be summed up in two words: *desolation* and *wilderness*. The following note by Tihomir Đorđević describes the conditions that the Vlachs migrating from Almaş found upon settling in the region of Homolje.

> When Homolje became deserted, the people further relate that for fifty years not a rooster was heard to crow there; everything lay abandoned. After that period, seven Vlach families from Almaş in Transylvania arrived at the ruined and forest-overgrown *Trška Church*, situated about an hour west of Žagubica on the road leading toward the Mlava region.[19] The descendants of one of these families, now living in the village of Laznica, know that their ancestors came from the village of Rakita near Almaş. To illustrate the extent of the desolation that then prevailed in Homolje, they recount that some members of these families, upon reaching Trška Church—surrounded at the time by dense and towering woodland—went ahead to inspect the area before bringing the rest of their households.[20] There they noticed smoke rising from the

18) The first comprehensive census in Serbia was conducted in 1862–1863. The original census registers are preserved in the Archives of Serbia within the records of the Ministry of Finance. Among the entries appears a column entitled: "Immovable property consisting of land, houses, buildings, and other structures owned by the same person." When, during the 1980s, I was extracting data from these census records for the villages of the Upper Poreč region, I was surprised to find that a considerable number of households carried the note "has no house" in this column. Subsequent field research using the genealogical method revealed that these families had lived in *borđeji* (dugout dwellings) throughout the entire eighteenth century and almost the whole of the nineteenth century. Their first *đi bîrńe* huts (built of logs), measuring *đi triĭ dîržîaļe în lung* ("three holding-poles in length"), were erected only shortly before the First World War or, in most cases, after it. One of my most valuable informants, *Janko Blagojević* from Jasikovo, told me that he had been born in a *borđiĭ* in 1934 and had spent a significant part of his childhood living in one.

19) It must be acknowledged that the geography of Romania was poorly understood not only by Tihomir Đorđević but also by Jovan Cvijić and many of his collaborators. Providing examples would require considerable space. Almaš (Romanian: Almăj) is not a settlement but a region in Banat, located in the upper course of the Nera River; geographically, it is a depression similar to the Serbian regions of Homolje and Zvižd. The village of Răchita lies within this valley and is situated more than one hundred kilometers from the nearest border of Transylvania. Moreover, Banat formed part of Transylvania only briefly during the sixteenth century.

20) According to this passage in Đorđević's note, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that the aforementioned "seven Vlach families" arrived in the Homolje region in 1721 as part of the first wave of Vlach co-

forest (some versions say that they heard a gunshot) and set out to investigate. On arriving, they found a man who had killed another man, was cutting flesh from the corpse, and eating it. They immediately killed him, but later regretted not having first asked who he was and where he had come from (Đorđević T. 1908: 165).

These grim images are necessary for understanding certain important aspects of the subsequent history of the Vlachs, including present-day circumstances, which many authors either fail to explain adequately or interpret in a fundamentally mistaken way.

The Vlachs at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919

The Vlachs in Serbia are a national minority that did not come into being through the usual process of border demarcation between two states followed by a treaty guaranteeing the rights of the minority population left on the opposite side of the border under the principles of international law and reciprocity, as was the case, for example, with the Romanians in Banat at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Instead, the Vlachs simply happened to be living on the territory of Serbia when the revolution broke out, eventually leading to liberation from Ottoman rule and the establishment of the Serbian national state—a process in which the Vlachs took part without imposing any conditions.[21)] Although they fought side

lonization from Banat, led that year by Count Mercy (see Map 2), since Đorđević's information that some members of these "seven families" came to Trška Crkva "to see the place before *bringing their families*" (emphasis added by Durlić) corresponds perfectly with Count Mercy's report: *tous les knèès généralment ont estré auprès de moi et m'ont assuré d'attirer tous leurs parents*, translated in Map 2 as "all [those who had settled the previous year] gathered around me and asked me to bring their relatives." However, this phrase may equally well be translated as "all those whom I had brought the previous year gathered around me and assured me that they would attract their relatives." This remarkable convergence between archival evidence and ethnographic field data, separated by almost two centuries (1721–1908), provides exceptionally strong confirmation of the thesis that the Vlachs were colonized during the period of Austrian occupation.

21)The attempt by Romanian pseudo-historiography to portray Karađorđe's insurgent banner, depicting a boar's head pierced by an arrow—an allegedly Triballian symbol—as evidence of a secret agreement between Karađorđe and the Vlachs, or, more precisely, between Serbia and the (non-existent) Triballia, concerning a joint struggle against the Ottomans, ranks among the most absurd historical fabrications. According to this claim, the Vlachs were to be granted autonomy after the liberation, allegedly including the right to secede and unite with Wallachia. For reasons that remain unclear, Romanian authors have never subjected this story to critical scrutiny. On the contrary, they have seized upon every political crisis to republish it and distribute it, in the form of pamphlets, semi-clandestinely among the Vlachs of eastern Serbia. A vivid example is provided by the following passage from one such pamphlet of recent date: "Să nu uităm că între 1804-1813 a existat o uniune între Serbia şi Tribalia, între sârbi şi românii timoceni pentru lupta împotriva turcilor. [...] Acest lucru este evident din stema respectivă care reunea cunoscută stemă a Serbiei rămasă până azi (cei 4 S în 4 colţuri) cu stema Tribaliei (un cap de mistreţ străpuns de o săgeată, uneori şi o bufniţă)." — Translation: "Let us not forget that between 1804 and 1813 there existed an alliance between Serbia and Triballia [sic!], that is, between the Serbs and the Timok Romanians, for the purpose of their joint struggle against the Turks. [...] This is evident from the coat of arms, which combined the well-known Serbian coat of arms (the four 'S' symbols in the four corners) with the coat of arms of Triballia (a boar's head pierced by an arrow, sometimes accompanied by an owl)" (Domozina 2008: 3–4). This claim concludes with the bitter assertion that the cunning Serbs betrayed their allies by conveniently forgetting the promise they had allegedly made once liberation from Ottoman rule had been achieved. Anyone with a modest knowledge of the origins of the First Serbian Uprising and the history of this part of the Balkans can only read such absurdities with astonishment. The uprising broke out spontaneously as an act of self-defense against the Slaughter of the Knezes, without any grand design for the liberation of Serbia from Ottoman rule and, consequently, without any organized political structure capable of concluding alliances with anyone—let alone with Triballia, which had already passed into history in Roman times (Jireček 1984: 3). Let us recall what Karađorđe's secretary, Boža Grujić, recorded that he had "heard from his [Karađorđe's] own lips" concerning the "**начало востанія Сербовь**" ("the beginning of the Serbian Uprising"): "**Пришедше къ њѫмѹ [Карађорђѹ] Тѹрки, да га сѫкѹ као и другѣ, онъ ихъ растера, побегне, сазове Станоя [Главаша], први данъ ньи 4. била, трећи данъ 9. седми дан 300 а дасети дан 2000. говорећи: ако намъ є по самомъ гинѹти нека смо ѹ гомили да гинемо**'" (Nenadović 1867: 70). From what sources the Romanian authors derived this alleged alliance with Triballia remains unknown; and since the alliance was supposedly secret, there is, conveniently, no need to prove that it ever existed. As for the coat of arms depicting a boar's head pierced by an arrow, it likewise has nothing whatsoever to do with Triballia: "The wild boar (represented either as a severed head or as a head cut off and pierced by an arrow through the forehead or the jaw) appears from the time of the Council of Constance (1414–1418) as the coat of arms of Serbia and, in later periods, more specifically, as the coat of arms of Triballia

by side with the Serbs, in the newly established state the Vlachs found themselves classified by the authorities as "subjects of a different nationality," yet without the fundamental rights normally accorded to national minorities. The only exception was the right to hold church services in the Vlach language, a privilege that was subsequently abolished during the nineteenth century.[22] Seen from their own perspective, they had no need for any formal protection of minority rights. Having escaped a great evil, and being free to occupy land or pasture their livestock without hindrance, the Vlachs felt with their whole being that in Serbia they had attained the greatest of all human rights: the right to be free and the right to be masters of their own destiny. For a peasant of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nothing more was needed.

Romania's attempt to bring the Vlachs onto the international stage through diplomatic maneuvering at the Peace Conference proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the Conference clearly revealed both Romania's attitude toward the Vlachs and the status accorded to them in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia. In short, to all concerned, the Vlachs served merely as a bargaining chip, brought into play only as a last resort.

At the Paris Peace Conference, the Romanians concentrated all their efforts on securing the fertile Banat, hoping—if possible—to obtain the entire region as far as the outskirts of Belgrade. When the head of the Yugoslav delegation, Pašić, pointed out that no state could allow its capital to lie directly on the frontier with a neighboring country, the Romanian delegation arrogantly suggested that Serbia simply move its capital back to Kragujevac, where it had once been (Petrović I. 1996: 279 ff.). As far as the Vlachs were concerned, however, the head of the Romanian delegation, Ion Brătianu, adopted a position that proved disastrous for them. In a memorandum dated 31 January 1919, he declared that "the Romanian Government [at the Conference] does not raise the question of uniting the many Romanians living in Serbia between the Timok and the Morava solely because it recognizes the importance of the Danube as a frontier of peace" (Mitrović 1975: 99). For its part, the Yugoslav delegation expressed the hope "that no one would wish to raise the [Vlach] question, since it is, in fact, an internal matter of a deserving wartime ally." Meanwhile, the Great Powers insisted that

or Turkish Serbia (Serbia south of the Sava and the Danube)," writes the distinguished Serbian heraldist Dragomir Acović (Acović 2008: 175). There is, however, also the explicit assertion that the coat of arms of Triballia "was invented by the Dalmatian Pavao Ritter Vitezović in his Stematographia of 1701" (Ruvarac 1896: 4).

22) As for the condition of the Church at the time, both in Wallachia and in the territory of present-day Serbia, it is sufficient to consult the report of Maksim Radkovič, who examined parish priests during the 1730s. He was so astonished to discover that most of them did not even know the Ten Commandments that he exclaimed: "Жали Бог оно свештенства, что је на нем. Десјат заповедеј божији на уст не ведајет. [...] Јеговим читањем не толико славит се јелико хулит се Бог," and concluded that the Church derived "никакове ползе не имат" ("no benefit whatsoever") from the Vlachs (Vitković 1884: 145–147), since they seldom attended church services and, moreover, rarely paid the prescribed ecclesiastical fees, except for "вјенчање и знамење" (marriage and burial services). Throughout this period, the educational and spiritual level of the Orthodox clergy had fallen to its lowest point since the establishment of the Church. As Erler aptly observed, "The priests were little more than peasants in cassocks who could barely read in their native language" (Erler 2003: 15). This situation persisted even after the Ottoman withdrawal, and the prolonged weakness of the Church was undoubtedly one of the principal reasons why the Vlachs of eastern Serbia preserved an ethnographic freshness that is difficult to find elsewhere in the Christian world (Durlić 2010: 8). This fact should be borne in mind when assessing the extent to which the historical circumstance that the Vlachs once had church services in their own language contributed to the preservation of their ethnic identity or to the later formation of national consciousness. Its influence was virtually non-existent, or at most no greater than the influence that Christian folklore itself could exert. Consequently, the subsequent replacement of the liturgical language—however dramatic that change may appear—cannot be regarded as a major cultural loss. The change was essentially personal rather than doctrinal, while the already weak ecclesiastical dogma remained powerless before the traditional religion of the Vlachs, which has been characterized as *animatistic-fatalistic* (Durlić 1995). Nor should it be forgotten that among the immigrant Vlachs were mountain shepherds who spent their entire lives in isolation from the outside world, who told the bawdiest stories about priests, priests' wives, and their daughters; and as late as the end of the twentieth century, during my own ethnological fieldwork, I still encountered Vlach women who officiated at traditional religious rituals despite never having heard of Jesus.

the settlement of the Banat should follow the principle that Serbia should receive the same number of Romanians as Romania would receive Serbs—a formula that, at the same time, excluded the Vlachs from every possible arrangement.

Jovan Cvijić entered the behind-the-scenes struggle over the Vlachs in a particularly revealing manner by advancing the astonishing theory that the Vlachs were a population "of Serbian origin but *Romanian culture,*" namely, that they were "descendants of Serbs who had migrated to Wallachia in the fourteenth century, whose great-grandchildren returned to the Timok region *after Serbia had been liberated from Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century.*"[23] (emphasis added by Durlić). This was a *blatant falsehood* put forward by a scholar of European renown, for by the time of Serbia's liberation the Vlachs had already been living on Serbian soil for more than a century and had fought alongside the Serbs against the Ottomans. Moreover, it is well known that the great wave of Serbian migration in the fourteenth century did not end in Wallachia but in the Kingdom of Hungary, particularly in Syrmia, Banat, and Bačka (Jireček 1984: 420-421). Cvijić was joined by Pašić, who, as is well known, was himself of Aromanian (Cincar) origin. He put forward an even more astonishing claim, asserting that "they [the Vlachs] would rather die than unite with Romania,"[24] and further maintained that the assimilation of the Vlachs into the Serbian nation was "an indisputable fact"—in other words, a completed process. "After all," concludes the historian A. Mitrović, "it may be said that raising the Vlach question [at the Paris Peace Conference] was of no great significance, while the subsequent course of negotiations over the Banat demonstrated that it played no important role whatsoever" (Mitrović 1975: 99).

Diplomatic Maneuvers and Dreams of the Revival of a Latin Empire

That no participant at the Paris Peace Conference was burdened with an excess of political scruples is illustrated by another episode that can only be described as a classic piece

23) Spector 1962: 124. Although Cvijić advanced a claim that was demonstrably false, subsequent Serbian scholarship has continued to glorify him. Thus, in one issue of the *Bulletin of the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*, it is stated that Cvijić enjoyed "great scholarly prestige" among the members of the Territorial Commission at the Paris Peace Conference and that he presented before them "professional and scholarly evidence" by which he "very effectively refuted the Romanian arguments" (Đukanović 1980: 52).

24) History would, scarcely two decades later, confirm Pašić's words with astonishing accuracy. Following the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, a large group of Vlachs was separated from the defeated Royal Yugoslav Army and sent to prisoner-of-war camps in neighboring Romania. There they were subjected to relentless Romanian propaganda designed to "awaken" their Romanian national consciousness, so that they might serve as a pretext for the military annexation of eastern Serbia. The plan was that, acting upon their supposedly signed petitions, the Romanian army could invade eastern Serbia under the slogan of "liberating its oppressed Romanian brethren from beneath the Serbian boot," and then annex the region to Romania on the basis of alleged historical and ethnic rights. Marshal Antonescu's reckless attempt on 10 September 1941 to enter Serbia with three warships near the village of Tekija and "occupy the regions inhabited by the Romanian (Vlach) population" failed after it was blocked by German forces (Blagojević 2006: 195). A reserve plan already existed in the form of the Memorandum on Population Exchange, prepared in 1940 for the Romanian Ministry for Minorities by its expert Dr. Petre Petrinca. It proposed that the Vlachs of eastern Serbia should be resettled in Banat, while the Serbs of Banat would be transferred to eastern Serbia (Ţurlea 2012: 152–194). As a kind of advance reconnaissance intended to test the attitude of the Vlachs toward this proposal, the journalist and lawyer Octavian Metea one day visited the prisoner-of-war camp in the village of Groda, near Timişoara. He selected five Vlach prisoners for interviews, among them Milorad Ćosić from Proštinac near Svilajnac in the Resava region, then twenty-eight years old and the father of three children—Tomislav, Dragoljub, and Jovanka. Asked about relations between the Vlachs and the Serbs in Resava, Metea concluded with evident surprise, on the basis of their answers: "În general românii trăesc foarte bine cu Sârbii, într'o armonie şi înţelegere perfectă" ("In general, the Vlachs live very well with the Serbs, in complete harmony and mutual understanding"). When he further asked whether they would be willing to resettle in Banat and exchange their property with the Serbs living there—thereby becoming united with their Romanian brethren in the mother country—he recorded that all five answered in unison that they would not do so even in death: "au răspuns cu toţii în cor, că nici morţi nu părăsesc locurile unde s'au născut şî au trăit moşii şi strămoşii lor" ("they all replied in chorus that not even in death would they leave the places where they had been born and where their grandfathers and forefathers had lived," emphasis added by Durlić) (Metea 1941: 262). Even the proponents of the *Memorandum* were taken aback by such a response and eventually abandoned the entire project (Ţurlea 2012: 4).

of political trickery—of the kind that invariably emerges once diplomatic gloves come off. The Romanian delegation submitted to the Conference a *memorandum* signed by one *Atanasije Popović Furnjika,* presented as the legitimate representative of the Vlachs of eastern Serbia. To strengthen his apparent credibility, the Romanians even bestowed upon him the fictitious title of President of the equally fictitious "National Committee of the Romanians in Serbia." In reality, this body existed only in exile, in Chișinău, and it is doubtful whether there was anyone there besides Furnjika himself who could have authorized him even in a private capacity to speak on behalf of the Vlachs.[25)] Meanwhile, the Vlachs of eastern Serbia had no idea that their fate was being discussed at such an important international gathering, for Furnjika had never enjoyed any influence or support among them. Indeed, to this day not a single piece of evidence has surfaced to suggest otherwise. Nevertheless, certain Romanian circles continue to glorify him and to present him to the Vlachs as the greatest historical figure of the twentieth century.[26)] Although the Memorandum failed to achieve its intended purpose, its wording—cast in the form of the supposed demands of the Vlachs—reveals Romania's true intentions with remarkable clarity. It explicitly declared: "We [the Vlachs], on the basis of Wilson's principles, request from the Peace Conference the right to be united with our free brethren in the Kingdom." In other words, through Furnjika, and ostensibly in the name of the Vlachs, Romania demanded the secession of eastern Serbia, from the Morava to the Timok, and its annexation to Romania. Pašić dismissed the proposal outright, arguing that such a solution was impossible because Serbian ships navigated the Morava [sic!], and that, for strategic reasons, it would be unacceptable for the opposite bank to belong to Romanian territory (Sandu-Timoc 2008:7).

Yet the matter is far more serious than this mutual exchange of diplomatic barbs would suggest. Popović's *Memorandum*, in fact, presents the Vlachs of eastern Serbia in a highly tendentious, yet remarkably ingenious, manner. First, it portrays them as the remnants of a supposed mixture of Roman colonists and Romanized Thracians encountered by the Slavs upon their arrival in the Balkans, a population that had been only partially Slavicized because it survived "in the high valleys and dense forests of this mountainous region" [sic!], thus invoking autochthony and historical continuity as crucial arguments in support of historical rights. Second, this alleged continuity is reinforced by the claim that "traces [of the Vlachs] may be found in several official acts of the Serbian kings in the fourteenth century." What follows is particularly revealing, for a third component is then introduced, namely that "to this ethnic structure were added Macedo-Romanian elements from the Pindus and the Balkans." Finally, as the crowning element of the argument, a fourth component is added, stating verbatim: "During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, new groups arrived and settled alongside the earlier inhabitants, this time coming from Little Wallachia (Oltenia) and from the Banat of Timişoara" (Popović A. 1919: 176). The conclusion is self-evident: at the Peace Conference, the Vlachs of eastern Serbia were presented as the bridge linking the Daco-Romanians of the north with the Macedo-Romanians of the

25) Those who knew perfectly well that Furnică had been nothing more than a puppet in Romanian hands sought to justify him as follows: *"Nu ne interesează că a fost el cu un grup restrâns sau cu câțiva colaboratori, ci ne interesează ideea pentru care a luptat și a cerut anexarea la România a acestei provincii care a mai aparținut de Țara Românească în Evul Mediu și avem vreo 5 hrisoave de la domnitorii români care vorbesc de stăpânirea acestei provincii numite sub Mircea cel Bătrân Podunavia."* ("What does not concern us is whether he acted with only a small group or a handful of associates; what concerns us is the idea for which he fought—the annexation to Romania of this province, which also belonged to the Principality of Wallachia during the Middle Ages. We possess some five charters issued by Romanian rulers referring to their sovereignty over this province, which under Mircea the Elder was known as Podunavia.") (Sandu-Timoc 2010: pass).

26) It is equally revealing to examine other details of the scandalous version of history that Professor Valentin Balucoiu of the National College in Craiova has been producing for Vlach children in eastern Serbia and, through certain Vlach NGOs and without the knowledge of the Serbian educational authorities, disseminating among them. (Băluțoiu 2009, 2010).

south, a pivotal population whose very existence was said to rest upon the convergence of ethnic and historical rights. In this way, Romanian territorial aspirations were portrayed as legitimate on a scale extending far beyond eastern Serbia alone. Remarkably, the underlying vision was nothing less than the revival of a "Latin Empire," founded upon the idea that Romania was the legal successor of the Eastern Roman Empire—a dream that gained renewed momentum following Romania's successful territorial expansion into Banat and Transylvania in 1918. "Even today, Bucharest still dreams of some kind of Romanian Empire with its capital at Constantinople," wrote the Slovenian anthropologist Niko Županić, an exceptionally well-informed observer of Balkan affairs, at the beginning of the twentieth century (Županić 1903: 34; see and: Barbulesku 1908: 49).

The renowned Serbian poet Jovan Dučić, who, during his diplomatic service in Rome and Bucharest, had the opportunity to observe political developments firsthand and behind the scenes, warned the Yugoslav government on the eve of the Second World War about the "idea of Latinity," which had emerged in Italy but was equally present in Romania, where its leading advocate was the distinguished historian and politician Dr. Nicolae Iorga. In a letter to the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Dr. Milan Stojadinović, Dučić wrote that he was convinced that "Iorga, like Mussolini, believes that a Latin Empire is possible if, through Albania and Bitolj, a connection can one day be re-established with *the Timok* [emphasis added by Durlić], restoring the link broken after the age of the Caesars but preserved to this day through the enduring vitality of Latin civilization." He further argued that this dream in Romania would go hand in hand with "the spread of the idea of the danger posed by *the surrounding Slavic world* [emphasis added by Durlić], which has prevented Romania from breaking out of its riverbed, like a mighty river confined between stone embankments" (Dučić 1991: 210).

That this idea remains very much alive is confirmed by the slogan "Bucureşti, capitala Latinităţii Orientale!" ("Bucharest, the Capital of Eastern Latinity!"), printed in 1995 by Florin Rotaru, the editor of the Romanian edition of Brătianu's *Bessarabia*, a work first published in French in the midst of the Second World War, in 1943 (Iorga 1972: 7). It is worth noting that the principal advocate of this idea, the historian Nicolae Iorga, was himself, as he testified, "din oameni din Pind" (See Brătianu 1995: I)—that is, an Aromanian from the Pindus.[27] This fact is of crucial importance for understanding his creative role in developing the ideology of Pan-Romanianism in Romania, a role that later Romanian historians explained as a response to the "glasul sângelui" ("the call of blood") (Zbuchea 2012: 4). Although the Pindus is merely a mountain range divided between Albania and Greece, ideal for pastoral communities whose only form of autonomy was the seasonal mountain pasture, although it lies more than 800 kilometres from Romania, and although reaching it requires crossing the borders of four states and passing, figuratively speaking, "over seven mountains and seven seas," none of this prevented Iorga from preparing for the Paris Peace Conference a memorandum asserting the historical and ethnic right of the Pindus Aromanians to experience a

27) Romanian linguists maintain that the self-designation *Armân* derives from the Latin *Romanus*, which survived in the territory of Dacia as Rumân. According to this view, among the group of transhumant pastoralists who migrated southward into the Balkans, the word acquired a prosthetic *a-*, becoming *Arumân*, in the same way as other words in this language that begin with *r-* (Papahagi 1935: 1; Puşcariu 1940: 223; Dimaca 2016: 13; and others). In the course of time, the *u* in the first syllable disappeared, and the form eventually stabilized as *Armân*, which has survived among these Balkan Vlachs, alongside such minor variants as *Rămăn*, *Romăn*, and *Rumăn*. According to some scholars, this migration took place sometime between the seventh and tenth centuries and was prompted by the Slavic expansion into the Balkans (Capidan 1942: 10). The designation *Aromân* (or *Aromun*) was introduced in place of the original *Armân* by the German linguist *Gustav Weigand*, who justified this innovation on the grounds that scholarship required a single name for the various Vlach groups. He then adapted the form to German orthography, arguing that German lacked the Vlach central vowels found in the original *Armân* (Weigand 1895: VII). Yet it is obvious even to a layperson that *Arman* would have been both an entirely accurate transcription and perfectly compatible with German spelling conventions. On the possible non-scholarly reasons that may have led Weigand to adopt this solution, see Dumistrăcel 2009: 32. For the most recent scholarly views on this terminological confusion, see Kahl 2004.

"renaşterea prin statul român" ("rebirth through the Romanian state"). This vision would later find its political embodiment in the puppet entity known as the "Principatul din Pind" ("Principality of the Pindus"), comprising thirteen settlements and enthusiastically supported by Fascist Italy between 1941 and 1944. None of this would be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that, in the Romanian case, the "idea of Latinity" eventually evolved into a geopolitical doctrine known as "geographical necessity," according to which a stronger state possesses the right to "move" its frontiers until it has acquired sufficient territory for the unhindered development of its nation, since "no nation stops before natural obstacles."[28] The Danube was no longer portrayed as a frontier of peace separating two friendly peoples, but rather as "the Romanian national axis," uniting the two halves of the Romanian nation. This does not mean that Brătianu's earlier position had been abandoned; rather, it suggests that his stance at the Peace Conference was merely a tactical maneuver, based on the assessment that Romania lacked the strength to pursue its ambitions simultaneously on two fronts—Banat and the Timok region. Consequently, all efforts were concentrated on Banat, while "Timok" was postponed until the first favorable opportunity, which presented itself at the beginning of the Second World War.

On the basis of this doctrine, Romanian authors openly advocated the "return" of the territory stretching from the Morava River to the Lom River to the "Romanian Motherland," thereby, in their words, "putting an end to the Serbian yoke," which had allegedly appropriated these, according to the same doctrine, "purely Romanian lands" in 1833 and thereafter ruled them through "a regime of intolerance and national oppression of the worst kind."[29] Significantly, this doctrine tends to reappear in various forms precisely during periods of political crisis—when major wars are imminent or already underway, and when the territorial integrity of a neighboring state is consequently called into question, especially if Romania considers that the country in question contains a deprived or oppressed Romanian minority. This pattern is most clearly reflected in the dates of publication of works promoting such Pan-Romanian views.[30] The consequences that these "doctrines" would eventually have for the Vlachs of eastern Serbia will become apparent in the following pages.

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28) Constantinescu 1941: 8, 84. This disgraceful book, overflowing with blatant anti-Serbian hostility, was written with the explicit purpose of justifying the "*Drepturile imprescriptibile ale României la anexarea Daciei Ripensis*" ("Romania's Inalienable Right to Annex Dacia Ripensis," that is, eastern Serbia). In 2003 it was translated into Serbian—very poorly, at that—and published by the NGO *Ariadne Filum* of Zaječar without any critical commentary or the scholarly qualifications and explanations that such a work unquestionably requires.

29) Constantinescu 1941: 63. The expression "*the return of the territory*" is intended to suggest that the region had once formed part of Romania—or, more precisely, of Wallachia. To support this claim, Constantinescu points to the year 1368, during the reign of the Wallachian Voivode Vlaicu. At that time, however, Wallachian authority extended only over the Vidin region (*Ţaratul Vidinului*, "the Land of Vidin"), not over the whole of eastern Serbia east of the Morava River, inhabited by the Vlachs and claimed as the object of the proposed annexation. It should also be recalled that the regions of Ključ, Negotin Krajina, and Crna Reka were legally incorporated into Serbia during the reign of Prince Miloš, on the basis of the Sultan's *Hatt-i Sharif* of 1830, as territories that had been liberated during the First Serbian Uprising. (Stojančević 2013: 31).

30) Given the extensive Romanian literature that has led us to this conclusion, and the detailed discussion that each individual work would require, it will suffice here to draw attention to a single illustrative example, in which not only the date and subject matter but also the identity of the publisher are particularly revealing. The work in question is *Spaţiul istoric şi etnic românesc* ("The Romanian Historical and Ethnic Space"), which appeared in two editions. The first was published in 1942, at the height of Ion Antonescu's fascist regime and during the agony of the dismembered and occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia, by *Monitorul Oficial şi Imprimeriile Statului* ("The Official Gazette and the State Printing House") in Bucharest. The second edition appeared in 1993, at the height of the breakup of Yugoslavia, this time published by *Editura Militară* ("Military Publishing House"), also in Bucharest (see Cociu 1993). It is also noteworthy that the book was distributed in eastern Serbia by the *Movement of Romanians-Vlachs of Yugoslavia*, founded by the dismissed Yugoslav People's Army Colonel Dimitrije Kračunović. In addition to his organization's stamp, the inside cover also bears the seal of the Romanian National Foundation for Romanians Abroad. („Fundaţia naţională pentru românii de pretutindeni")!

The Balkan Vlachs and their Cincari

There is an extensive body of literature on the Balkan Vlachs, especially those of the Pindus Mountains, published in several languages. Yet, despite the growing number of sources and increasingly sophisticated methods of research, no generally accepted conclusion has been reached. Most authors ultimately remain confined within the interpretative framework of their own national historiographies and ideological perspectives. The sheer scope of this bibliography is illustrated by the selected references in Zef Mirdita's book Vlasi u historiografiji (Vlachs in Historiography), which alone lists more than 1,400 titles (Mirdita 2004: 409-498). Fortunately, for the purposes of the present study, only one branch of this vast and often contentious subject is of particular relevance—the Armanian Vlachs, better known as the Aromanians, or Cincars!

As already noted, the Cincars represented the merchant and artisan branch of the Pindus Armanians, whom Serbian merchants distinguished by their characteristic pronunciation of the number *five*: *cinci*, as opposed to the Romanian *činč* or the softened Banat form *śinś*.[31] Long-distance trade developed naturally as an integral part of transhumant pastoralism, which, owing to the enormous size of the flocks grazing the barren mountain pastures, produced vast quantities of commodities based primarily on wool as the principal raw material (Karakosta 2011: 155). Such goods could be marketed only in major commercial centres situated far from the Pindus, yet the Cincars reached them with their own caravans, transporting and selling their merchandise in Thessaloniki, Constantinople, Venice,[32] Trieste, Vienna, Moscow, and many other cities. This required merchants not only to possess an intimate knowledge of trade routes, but also to master foreign languages and attain a certain level of education, without which international commerce on such a scale would have been impossible. The Pindus Armanians acquired all these advantages in Moscopole, their principal urban centre, which, at an altitude of 1,300 metres, had as many as 60,000 inhabitants at a time when Athens had only half that population and Belgrade barely 10,000. The town was probably founded by the surrounding Vlach pastoralists in the thirteenth century, and by the eighteenth century it had developed into a flourishing city with paved streets, a water-supply system, more than seventy churches, a printing house, and a lyceum (Nikolin 2008: 4). The importance attached to education, particularly to the study of languages, is demonstrated by the remarkable fact that in 1794 a four-language dictionary (*Λεξικόν τετραγλωσσόν*) was printed there by Daniel, the Bishop of Moscopole, himself of Armanian origin. This work later served as one of the models for Vuk Karadžić's *Срūски рјечник* ("Serbian Dictionary"), published in 1818 (Mutavdžić 2014: 113). Such a prosperous city inevitably attracted brigands and marauders, the most devastating of whom was the ruthless Ali Pasha of Ioannina, who, after repeated attacks throughout the eighteenth century, finally succeeded in 1788 in destroying Moscopole completely and dispersing its inhabitants. Many of the refugees settled in Macedonia, chiefly in Bitola and the neighbouring settlements of Gopeš, Malovište, Magarevo, Trnovo, Nižepole, and Rotino, as well as in Ohrid and its surrounding area, and in Kruševo, Trstenik, and Birino (Mirdita 2004: 139).

31) The earliest known occurrence of this name in Serbia dates from 1718, although there are good reasons to believe that it may have come into use much earlier (Filipović 1951: 58–59). It is also noteworthy that the Vlachs of eastern Serbia themselves refer to them as *Cincari* (Ţîn̦ari), suggesting that they first encountered them within a Serbian-speaking environment.

32) Thanks to the archival research of *Valeriu Papahagi* in the archives of Venice and Paris, we possess a remarkably detailed picture of the trade between the Pindus *Armâni* and the Venetians during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From Moscopole were exported large quantities of wool, coarse woolen cloth, blankets woven from goat or deer hair, veils, as well as a variety of products made from goatskin and calfskin, among other goods (Papahagi 1935: 47–48). These products were manufactured by the households of Moscopole, which in every practical sense functioned as small family-run workshops or factories.

Others, either individually or in small groups, continued northwards into Serbia and Bulgaria, gradually establishing themselves in various settlements, among them the village of Preobraženje in the Pčinja District (See the monograph by Stojanović 2003).

Brief Excursus on the Cincari in the Vlach Villages of the Porečka Reka Region

The significant role of the Cincars in the emergence of Serbian towns and the formation of Serbian bourgeois society is well known. Much has been written about them, and many are remembered by name for their outstanding contributions to the people among whom they settled and with whom they became fully integrated, such as Nušić, Pašić, Sterija, Miša Anastasijević, and others. Far less is known, however, about those Cincars who chose the village as their permanent home. It is therefore important to shed light on such cases whenever reliable ethnographic evidence is available, particularly from regions about whose ethnogenetic and ethnic history little is otherwise known, and especially when they concern the area from which the principal material for *Vorbar* originates.

The villages of the Porečka River Valley, particularly those of Upper Poreče, are in question, where systematic genealogical research has been conducted, although the collected material has not yet been published (Durlić 1984). Families of Cincar origin have been identified in Rudna Glava, Crnajka, and Tanda. One of the ancestors of the Cincars of Crnajka was mentioned by Kanitz, who, while descending into the village from Šarkamen across the Deli Jovan pass in October 1889, noted that "the Cincar innkeeper welcomed me with a peculiar nod of the head, apparently intended as an expression of admiration" (Kanitz 1985: 443). Thanks to his descendants, who were still living in the village at the time of my fieldwork and whose female-line descendants remain there today, we know not only the name of this Cincar but also many details of his remarkably interesting life. His name was Naun Dimitrijević. According to the inscription on his tombstone, he was "born in Donja Belica, Albania, in 1820," from where, according to family tradition, he fled because of Ottoman oppression. He died in Crnajka in 1902. He first worked there as a baker and later became an innkeeper. He had two daughters, and one of them married Nikola Tasić, also a Cincar, who had been born in Gopeš in 1863. Nikola's son, Dušan Tasić, earned his doctorate in law at the Sorbonne and, according to family testimony, was a close associate of Nikola Pašić during the Paris Peace Conference. During the Second World War, Dušan was killed by Chetniks in Crnajka. Nikola Tasić left descendants through both the male and female lines, now living in various parts of Serbia.[33] A third Cincar in this village was Nikola Mavrin, who, according to family tradition, came from the vicinity of Mavrovo in Macedonia. The exact date of his arrival is unknown, but he is already recorded in a poll-tax register of 1824 preserved in the Archives of Serbia.[34] On his estate there were visible remains of an old settlement, which the villagers of Crnajka jokingly called *Orașu lu Mavrin* ("Mavrin's Town"). Later research established that these were the archaeometallurgical remains of the Austrian occupation period (Krainović 1995: 65),[35] suggesting that Nikola's arrival should be dated to the early decades of the second half of the eighteenth century, since enough time must have elapsed after the Austrian withdrawal in 1739 for the abandoned mining settlement and its installations to fall into ruin. Whereas Naun and his descendants engaged in trade, Mavrin appears to have adopted livestock breeding at an early stage, probably as a *źińire-n kasă* ("resident son-in-law"), just as most people in this region did at the time. He left no male descendants, and the only trace of his lineage is the *poḷikra* (family nickname) *Mavronji*, still borne by the

33) Durlić 1984: Register 3, Folder I, File 1 (Cincars).

34) AS, Tefters Collection, No. 297. Chibuk Tax Register for the Poreč River District, 1824. Village of Crnajka.

35) The site has been dated to 1724 ± 27 years.

Trailović family, descendants of the husbands of his female descendants. The Trailovićs originate from the Štirbanja clan in the neighbouring village of Gornjane, whose founder, Sau ("Sava"), migrated there from Bessarabia during the first half of the eighteenth century.[36)]

In Tanda, whose population can be traced genealogically back to the end of the eighteenth century,[37)] the Grekonji clan is of Cincar origin. Its ancestor, Jovan Greku, appears in the Poll Tax Register ("Arački tefter") of 1828 under serial number 19, together with his sons Mladen and Nikola, [38)] the latter being recorded in another surviving census as having been born in Tanda in 1815.[39)] Jovan Greku, of whom local tradition remembers only that he was a *Rumîn đin Greśiĭe* ("a Vlach from Greece"), has today two lines of descendants, bearing the surnames Nikolić and Mladenović after the names of his two sons. Nevertheless, both branches are still known in the village by the collective family nickname *Grekonji* ("the Greeks"). They live in the part of the village known as Barnideo and celebrate Petkovica as their family patron saint's day.[40)]

In Rudna Glava, the first Cincar to settle was Simelku, who arrived during the second half of the nineteenth century. He originated from Gopeš in Macedonia. Literate and exceptionally shrewd, he amassed considerable wealth as what the local people called a "wooden lawyer," exploiting the peasants by encouraging them to engage in endless lawsuits and, through the accumulating "legal" expenses, gradually taking possession of their property. He subsequently persuaded several of his relatives from Gopeš to join him, sending them a letter in which, as he later boasted publicly, he wrote the following sentence: "*Veńiț, fraţîlor, asta ĭe vaļa lu prostovań!*" ("Come here, brothers, this is the valley of fools!"). His descendants are still known by the family nickname *Turku* ("the Turk"), suggesting that these Cincars arrived while the territories of Serbia south of Niš were still under Ottoman rule. Somewhat later, four Cincar brothers from the same village also settled in Rudna Glava. According to local tradition, *a fost ńegustorĭ* ("they were livestock traders"): they bought cattle from local peasants and drove them to the market in Veliko Gradište, from where the animals were exported to Austria-Hungary. At first they lived as tenants in various households, but gradually established homes of their own. Their family was known as *Alu Naun* ("the Nauns"), and one of the brothers, Kosta, has descendants in the village today. They bear the Serbianized surname Naunović, although among the Vlachs they are still known simply as *ţînţari* ("the Cincars").[41)] Kosta's branch of the family earned its livelihood as tailors.

Finally, it is worth recalling the most renowned Cincar from this region: *Miša Anastasijević*, who was born in Poreč (present-day Donji Milanovac) around 1803 and whose original name was *Miša Nastasov*, under which he appears in the Poll Tax Register ("Arački tefter") of 1828.[42)] The names *Naum* or *Naun*, and *(A)Nastas* or *Antanas*, were particularly characteristic of the Cincars during the nineteenth century because of their special vene-

36) Durlić 1984: R-3, Folder-IV-Radovica, File-6 (Mavroni).

37) Tanda does not appear on maps from the period of the Austrian occupation and is first recorded as an inhabited settlement in 1784. Genealogical research has shown that its present-day population traces its origins to the late eighteenth century.

38) AC, МФ, ПО К 121/31. Tefters Collection. Poll Tax Register for Poreč and the Poreč River District, 1828. Village of Tanda.

39) AC, МФ ПК, 171. Census Register for 1863. Krajina District, Poreč River County. Village of Tanda. Under entry No. 14, the household of Nikola Greku, aged 48, is recorded. He was living with his wife Kalina, aged 40, and their sons Paun, aged 12, and Ilija, who was only one year old.

40) Durlić 1984: R-3, Folder I, Fille 34 (Grekonji).

41) Durlić 1984: R-1, F-III, F-10 (Cincars).

42) AC, МФ, ПК 121/31. This census was first published by Vidosava Stojančević in 1965 in *Razvitak* (Zaječar), No. 3 (pp. 60–71) and Nos. 4–5 (pp. 72–79). It was later reprinted in the commemorative collection of her works, "Ethno-Historical Processes in Eastern Serbia in the Nineteenth Century" (*Etno-istorijski procesi u istočnoj Srbiji u 19. veku*), Historical Archives, Negotin, 2003, pp. 128-135.

ration of Saints Naum and Anastas (Popović D. 1937: 75). Likewise, the word *Grk* ("Greek") came to be widely used in popular speech as a synonym for a merchant of Cincar origin.[43] Thus, virtually every citizen of Serbia today bearing the surname *Anastasijević* or *Nastasijević*—or, even more tellingly, *Naumović* or *Naunović*—may confidently regard himself as a descendant of a Pindus Armanian. In tribute to the contribution that the Cincars made to Serbia, it is worth remembering that the man who laid down his life beside Karađorđe in the Radovanjski Lug was not, as one might expect, a loyal son of the Serbian people, but *Naum Krnar*, a Vlach Cincar born in Moscopole in the Pindus Mountains.[44]

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In the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Cincars appeared officially under their ethnic designation as early as the first population census of 1921, which, like the preceding censuses conducted in Serbia, classified the population according to mother tongue (See Popis 1921). In addition to the Cincars, census category No. 19 also included the Vlachs of eastern Serbia, whom the Serbian authorities had, as already noted, officially recorded under the ethnonym "Romanians" for more than half a century in all administrative documents, as well as the Romanians of Banat, who became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as a recognized Romanian national minority under the treaty of 10 September 1919. The implementation of these minority rights, however, did not proceed smoothly. Indeed, it has been observed that the position of the Romanian minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia remained essentially the same as it had been under Austria-Hungary, where it had been subjected to Magyarization. Now exposed instead to Serbianization, many Romanian intellectuals from the Yugoslav Banat emigrated to their mother country.[45] It is far less widely known that this census category also included Roma whose mother tongue was Vlach (Popović Z. R. 1924: 454). Because these different populations were grouped together under a single heading, it is impossible to determine their exact numbers from the census data alone.

The Position of the Vlachs in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created by three peoples who attempted to overcome their differences by presenting themselves as a "triune" or "three-named" nation at the most sensitive stage in the transformation of each from an ethnic community into a modern nation. Because this process remained incomplete, the new state ultimately proved to be little more than an empty shell, soon filled with mutual distrust and hostility. The largest nation, the Serbs, also found themselves confronted with sizeable German, Hungarian, and Turkish national minorities, created through the painful dismemberment of those once-powerful nations following their defeat in the First World War. These minorities, as Jovan Dučić vividly observed, fell upon Serbia "like heavy stones."[46] Throughout the interwar period, the defeated powers sought to exploit these minority communities in order to undermine the new state and recover the territories over which they had exercised full control before 1914 (Tešić 1996: 75). These minorities were by no means insignificant,

43) *Ibid:* 111. In the Upper Poreč region there are also two toponyms derived from the same root, both located in an area bearing clear traces of old mining and metallurgy. The first is *Greč*, at the source of the Šaška River (east of Majdanpek), a Serbianized form of the Vlach word *Greś* ("Greeks"). The second lies some ten kilometers farther east and refers to a hill known to the Vlachs as *Grĭeku* ("the Greek"). This hill forms the northern boundary of the narrow valley called Šaška, from which the river flowing through it takes its name. It is well known that the name *Šaška* preserves the memory of the medieval Saxon ("Sasi") miners who once worked in this region.

44) https: //sr.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/Наум_Крнар [19.04.2016.]

45) For the position of the Romanian national minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, see Popi 1976; Pržić 1933, chapter "Yugoslav–Romanian Agreements" ("*Jugoslovensko-Rumunski sporazumi*"). (151-154); Janjetović 2007: 123-130 i dr.

46) AJ, Fund 37, File 30, Archival Unit 223.

accounting for more than sixteen percent of the total population. The unresolved national question and the persistent tensions between the state and its minorities—particularly the minorities' destabilizing political activities—would later become recognized in virtually every history textbook as one of the principal causes of the collapse of this Versailles creation.

In the struggle for the protection of minority rights, the German and Hungarian minorities took the lead, while somewhat later the Romanians of Banat also began to secure the rights guaranteed to them as a national minority (Božić 1972: 445).

The status of the Vlachs in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was effectively determined—and, in many respects, settled for the remainder of the twentieth century—at the Paris Peace Conference, where the Yugoslav delegation's position that the Vlachs constituted "an internal matter" of Serbia, as "a deserving wartime ally," passed without objection (Mitrović 1975: 99). Nor were the Vlachs able to improve their position through their mother tongue, since the official policy held that schools, churches, the media, and other institutions associated with minority rights could be established only on the basis of "a language sufficiently developed, possessing established grammatical rules, its own literature, and an independent literary life." The Vlach language, by contrast, was regarded as a dialect "whose rules had not been standardized" and which could therefore be used freely only in everyday communication (Pržić 1933: 227). In reality, the Vlach language is the vernacular Romanian language, consisting of several dialects that have preserved such archaic features that the Vlachs perceive Standard Romanian—which developed north of the Danube after the migration of their ancestors—as a foreign language (Durlić 2020: 42). For this reason, Standard Romanian cannot legitimately be imposed upon them as their mother tongue.

The Manipulation of Mother Tongue in Population Censuses

The recording of mother tongue as a census category, alongside religious affiliation, was introduced as a mandatory requirement at the Eighth Congress of European Statisticians, held in St. Petersburg in 1872 (Jakšić 1889: 1), although it had already been taken into consideration somewhat earlier in Serbia (see Jakšić 1869). Over time, mother tongue acquired exceptional importance because it came to be "projected onto national affiliation," [47] making it a decisive factor in determining the status, rights, and, ultimately, the very survival of national minorities.

Let us dwell for a moment on mother tongue as a census category, for in certain circumstances it produced paradoxical results, presenting a distorted picture of the numerical strength of particular ethnic groups, not to mention the consequences for minority rights. It was sufficient for a member of a minority to learn the language of the majority to be statistically erased from the people into which he had been born and to which he continued to belong in every essential sense. Serbia encountered this problem already in its earliest censuses during the mid-nineteenth century. The difficulty first arose with the Roma who spoke the Vlach language but, because of their dark complexion, were regarded as belonging to a different "race" and were therefore not classified according to their mother tongue but, as contemporaries put it, "according to the blackness of their skin" (Jakšić 1869: 102). An even greater problem confronted Cvijić's collaborators during their field investigations

47) Janjetović 2005: 63. "During the interwar period, censuses in Yugoslavia were conducted on the basis of respondents' mother tongue, which was then taken as an indicator of national affiliation. This approach was adopted in response to the manipulations practiced under Austria-Hungary, where the census recorded the *Umgangssprache* (language of everyday use). Such a method favored the ruling German and Hungarian nations, since it made it possible to count as members of those dominant nationalities people who lived outside their own ethnic communities, were economically dependent upon employers with whom they had to communicate in German or Hungarian, lived in mixed marriages, and so forth."

into the origin of the population. In his otherwise detailed *Instructions for the Study of Population Origins and Psychological Characteristics*, Cvijić neither defined the concept of mother tongue nor explained how ethnic affiliation should be determined on that basis in field research (Cvijić 1987: 273 ff.). His collaborators therefore resorted to their own methods, generally applying the simple rule that anyone who spoke Serbian was a Serb, or that anyone who celebrated the family patron saint's day ("*slava"*) must certainly be a Serb. Thus, for example, in his study *Požarevačka Morava*, Mihajlo J. Miladinović wrote of the *Žurkini* family in the village of Kostolac: "The Žurkini migrated from Banat as Vlachs, but are now almost completely Serbianized, so that only the older members of the family still speak Vlach, whereas the younger generation no longer does"(Miladinović 1928: 144) In other words, it was enough for Vlachs to learn Serbian for them to lose their ethnic identity in the eyes of the researchers. This becomes even more evident in the case of an elderly man named Jonja, who came from Caransebeş in Banat as a Vlach in the mid-nineteenth century but spent forty years working at the Požarevac Gymnasium. During that time, he learned Serbian and, according to the account, "became Serbianized, as did all of his descendants" (Ibid: 174). Numerous similar examples can be found in the literature.[48)] For the sake of objectivity, it should also be noted that Cvijić's researchers recorded cases of Serbs becoming "Vlachized," which occurred after they had lived for many years in villages with a Vlach majority and had adopted the Vlach language. Such cases were recorded throughout eastern Serbia—in the Negotin Krajina (Jovanović K. 1940: passim), Zvižd (Lazić 1939), Upper Poreče,[49)] as well as in the Požarevac Morava region (Miladinović 1928: 114-115. See the examples from the village of Orljevo), and Mlava (Jovanović Lj. 1903: 422-426).[50)] How Serbian nationalists reacted to this phenomenon will be discussed in the following pages.

48) In this light, it becomes easier to understand the dramatic decline in the number of Vlachs recorded between the 1895 census, when they numbered 159,510, and the census conducted only five years later, in 1900, which recorded an astonishing decrease of 37,081 persons, leaving a total of only 122,429. Besides the notorious inefficiency of the administration of the time, deficiencies in fieldwork, and the extremely small number of officials responsible for processing the results—the State Statistical Office employed only four staff members (Census 1900: VI)—the unusual method used to determine nationality undoubtedly played a major role. This was all the more significant because the number of Vlachs attending primary school was rapidly increasing during that period, and with it the number who had learned Serbian, thereby meeting the criterion for being recorded as Serbs. Finally, the Statistical Office itself openly acknowledged, in comparing the results of the 1895 and 1900 censuses, that the latter census was inaccurate (Census 1905: Introduction).

49) Durlić 1984. A striking example is the *Srbulješći* (=Serbs) lineage in the village of Gornjane, which occupies its own separate *mala* (hamlet) below the Vraca Pass. Their ancestors arrived there during the Second Great Migration of the Serbs from Kosovo under Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta. During my fieldwork in 1984, while collecting genealogical material, the people of this hamlet were unable to explain why the other villagers called them *Srbulješći*. They regarded themselves as Vlachs and consistently declared themselves as such in the censuses. When I asked whether the name might indicate that their ancestors had been Serbs, they merely shrugged their shoulders and replied, "*Pă, puaće să fiie*" ("Well, perhaps."). I encountered similar assimilated lineages throughout the Upper Poreč region, where memories of Serbian ancestry had survived only as faint recollections or had disappeared entirely in certain branches of the genealogy. It was precisely such examples that compelled me to introduce into my own epistemological toolkit a new analytical concept, which I have called "*existential consciousness as the sovereign of all forms of consciousness*," since the existing scholarly methods proved incapable of explaining phenomena of this kind.

50) Kobilje, Manastirica, Starčevo, and others. For the purposes of my monograph *The Vlachs of Carpathian Serbia*, I carried out a computerized analysis of the entire body of genealogical material collected by Cvijić's collaborators in 182 villages of eastern Serbia where Vlach populations were recorded in various historical sources during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. With regard to acculturation, the results may be summarized as follows: a total of 313 Serbian lineages had become Vlachized, representing approximately 9% of all recorded lineages, most of them among the Eastern Vlachs; conversely, 436 Vlach lineages had become Serbianized, accounting for about 13%, the majority of them in the Pomoravlje region. These figures confirm that in real life, beyond the reach of politics, the law of the majority operates as a natural law of adaptation, to which people ultimately conform under the influence of existential consciousness.

Manipulating the Family Patron Saint's Day as a Marker of Ethnic Identity

A particularly revealing comment is found in Miladinović's *Požarevačka Morava*, where he writes: "Most Vlachs and Vlachized Serbs," he observes, "had no *slava* when they arrived; they adopted it here under the influence of the parish priests. Many Vlachs, however, brought their *slava* with them, which shows that they had previously become Vlachized and were originally of Serbian descent" (Miladinović 1928: ibid). Since the *slava* will be discussed elsewhere as an alleged proof that the Vlachs are a people of Serbian origin, it is sufficient here to point out that *Vorbar*, in its entries *prazńik*, *sîmt*, and *înkinat*, provides ample and reliable ethnographic material for a comparative analysis demonstrating that the Vlach *slava* is an indigenous Vlach institution, only superficially affected by Christianization and Serbianization. Suffice it to note that even its Serbian-derived name, *praznjik*, frequently cited as evidence in support of the above thesis, is not used by all Vlachs. A large Vlach population in Braničevo and Stig has preserved the original Vlach term *sîmt*, derived from the Latin *sanctus*. This is only one of several fundamental differences. Whereas among the Serbs the *slava* lasts a single day, among the Vlachs it lasts five days and, according to oral tradition, formerly continued for as many as eight days. This places it within the ancient calendrical cycles dating from the period when the week itself consisted of eight days.[51] The same archaic calendrical tradition also includes the annual festivals of *Sîntuađiri* ("The Todorovci"), dedicated to the mythical horses embodying the Thracian Horseman; *Dzîļiļi vînturuasă* or *Rusaļiļi* ("The Rusalii"), dedicated to the demonic winds that lead us back into the Indo-European past; and *Marćińi* ("The Mratinci"), dedicated to wolves, among whom the *lupol alb* ("white wolf") appears as a kind of primordial totemic ancestor from the beginning of Time (see the corresponding entries in *Vorbar*). Most importantly, however, among the Serbs the *slava* is attached to the *rod*—the patrilineal kinship group—and accompanies its members wherever they may settle. Among the Vlachs, by contrast, the *slava* is attached to the *sfîntua*, a chthonic protective deity responsible for the fertility of fields and orchards, the fecundity of livestock, and the health and well-being of the people who live and work on a particular estate. It is to this deity that the Vlachs bow forty-four times during the ritual, kissing the ground on both sides of the ritual loaf placed upon a man's shirt spread over the earthen floor of the house. The rite known as *înkinatu* (prostration) was traditionally performed in the corner behind the entrance door of the room where the ritual table was laid, precisely beneath the door hinges, where every earthen house (*borđeĭ*) once contained a clay image of a deity whose name has long since been forgotten (see *Vorbar*, entry *borđeĭ*).[52] The Vlach *slava* is therefore attached to the estate that sustains the household rather than to a lineage or family. An estate may change owners, yet its protective saint passes together with the property to the new owner. It is even possible for two brothers owning neighbouring estates to celebrate different *slavas*. Conversely, should a patron saint fail in his duty to protect the household that venerates him, he may be replaced, with a new protector chosen

51) The reference is to the so-called *nundinal cycle* of the ancient Roman calendar, inherited from the Etruscans and, in all probability, ultimately originating in the "primordial homeland of the Vedas"—the Arctic Circle. (Tilak 1987: 169).

52) Durlić 1998: 253-258. For the possible origins of the Vlach *slava* in the Roman cult of the *Lares*, see Truhelka 1985: 342–406. On the cult of the *Lares*—originally Roman deities of cultivated fields and later protectors of the household hearth—see Cermanović-Srejović 1992: 310. For the view that the family patron saint's feast ("krsna slava") among the Romanians of Banat "has its origins among the ancient Romans," see Barjaktarović 1985: 127. Romanians in both parts of Banat (from whom the Western Vlachs of eastern Serbia descend) likewise call the *slava - sîmt*, whereas the word for "holiday" (*praznik*) is regarded as a later borrowing from Serbian (Flora 1971: 184). Romanian scholarship likewise maintains that the *slava* customs of the Banat Romanians "have their roots in the Roman cult of the household hearth and the ancestors." (Hedeşan 1998: 59).

by drawing lots. Nothing even remotely comparable exists in the Serbian *slava*. The theory that these two customs share a common origin should therefore be rejected, particularly its Serbocentric variant, which automatically identifies every people celebrating a family patron saint's day as ethnogenetically Serbian and seeks, whenever possible, to incorporate them into the Serbian national corpus.

The Vulgarities of Academic Scholarship and Serbian Publicism in the Denigration of the Vlach Minority

Such a distorted application of the criterion of mother tongue, combined with equally distorted and unscientific interpretations of traditional customs, clearly served the purpose of inflating the size of the majority population at the expense of the minority (Janjetović 2005: 63), while simultaneously diminishing, depriving of identity, and humiliating that minority, often through the use of the most vulgar insults. The extent to which Serbian scholarship and public discourse of the period were prepared to go in this regard will become evident from the examples discussed in the following pages. The reader should be warned, however, that they make for deeply disturbing reading.

a) The Tihomir R. Đorđević Episode

Let us begin with several selected passages from the writings of Tihomir R. Đorđević, the founder of Serbian ethnology, university professor, and member of the Serbian Royal Academy, whose work continues to be regarded within the academic community as the foremost authority on the Vlachs of eastern Serbia and their origin.

In his study *Rumuni u Srbiji za vreme prve vlade kneza Miloša (1815–1839)* ("Romanians in Serbia during the First Reign of Prince Miloš, 1815–1839"), Đorđević wrote, without offering either evidence or qualification, the following remarkable statement: "During the reign of Prince Miloš, the Romanians were true savages, bad subjects, habitual criminals, devoid of moral scruples and incapable of living in a free country" (Đorđević T. 1923: 182). Quite apart from the fact that this distinguished scholar identified a Romanian ethnic community before the creation of the Romanian state, the essential question is by what scholarly procedure, by what methodology, and on the basis of which sources he arrived at such a conclusion. Did some forgotten statistical record from Prince Miloš's time perhaps reveal to him that the prisons of the period were filled predominantly with Vlach offenders, or did he simply produce this assertion without evidence, with the sole purpose of insulting and humiliating the Vlachs by portraying them as unworthy inhabitants of the Serbian state—conduct hardly befitting a scholar of his reputation? Remarkably, the extensive Serbian ethnological literature published thereafter contains virtually no critical comment on this passage. Given how frequently Đorđević's work has been cited, one may reasonably conclude either that subsequent Serbian ethnologists accepted these claims or chose to ignore them, both of which are equally troubling. Fortunately, objective evidence from the somewhat later nineteenth century paints a very different picture, showing that the proportion of convicted criminals in the two ethnic communities corresponded closely to their respective shares of the population. Such evidence was provided by the distinguished traveller Felix Kanitz during his visit to the Požarevac Penal Institution in October 1887. Reporting on the women's section of the prison, he wrote: "Of the 105 women and girls sentenced to hard labour and the 10 sentenced to lighter punishment, 16 were Vlach women, a proportion corresponding to the numerical strength of that ethnic group in Serbia. Thus, the moral standards of Serbian and Vlach women appear to have been approximately the same" (Kanic 1985: 172).

As if it were not enough that Đorđević had branded the Vlachs as savages and wicked subjects, he did not hesitate for a moment to declare them collectively insane as well. On pages 771–772 of the sixteenth volume of *Srpski književni glasnik* ("Serbian Literary Herald"), published on 16 May 1906, in his well-known travelogue "Through Our Romanians", one reads in disbelief: "*It seems to me that our Romanians possess a peculiar mental disposition toward unconsciousness* [and] *that they often suffer from a kind of madness which lasts for a short time and then passes*" (Đorđević T. 1906: 771-772). Rather than being criticized and dismissed as sheer nonsense and absurdity, this thesis inspired subsequent generations of eminent Serbian scholars to use it as an explanation for certain phenomena that came under their scrutiny as particularly attractive and fashionable research topics. Thus, Professor Dušan Bandić, of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade—the very department where Đorđević himself had taught—in his paper *The Shamanistic Component of the Rusalia Ritual*, whose purpose was to provide a (finally) scientific explanation of the phenomenon of the so-called Duboka Rusalia,[53] famous for their spectacular trance states, found support precisely in Đorđević's characterization. Bandić writes: "*As early as the beginning of this century, T. Đorđević pointed to the high degree of nervous instability among the Vlach population of northeastern Serbia, as well as to their tendency to fall into ecstatic states. He* [Đorđević] *emphasizes that the Vlachs have 'a peculiar mental disposition toward unconsciousness' and that they 'often suffer from a kind of madness which lasts for a short time and then passes*." Bandić does not stop there, but further reinforces his position by claiming that "*these observations have been partially confirmed by later research*" (Bandić 1978: 33).[54] Neither Đorđević nor Bandić ever questioned their own assertions, nor did they recognize the profound epistemological error underlying their conclusions. Professor Bandić, in particular, failed in the scholarly obligation to critically examine every source he relied upon—a principle he himself taught to his students (among whom was the present

53) The very term "Rusalia" is both incorrect and seriously detrimental to historical truth, for it is neither the original Vlach name of this ritual nor the traditional designation of the period during which it is performed. From time immemorial, the Vlachs have called this season *dzîḽiḽi vînturuasă* ("the Windy Days"), while the women who entered trance were believed to have been possessed by the wind spirits (*a pikat dă vînt* — "to have been struck by the wind"). Most tragic of all is the fact that the Vlachs of Zvižd themselves, under the overwhelming influence of newspapers, books, and television programs, abandoned their authentic terminology, dismissing it, in their own words, "*ka prostîĭa lu aĭ bătrîń kare n-a şćut să skriie*" ("as the foolishness of illiterate ancestors"), and began speaking instead of "Rusalia." Yet this term belongs to a relatively recent, Christianized and Slavicized cultural layer. Instead of preserving the authentic customs handed down by their forebears, they gradually began recounting to researchers what they had read in newspapers and books or seen in self-important television documentaries. I witnessed this process personally during my fieldwork in Zvižd in 2008. One of my informants, *Vidosava Šojanović*, a member of the village folklore ensemble ("KUD") in Duboka who performed the role of a "Rusalia dancer," described the staged performance and its folklore choreography as though it were the authentic traditional custom. When I asked whether she had learned to "fall into trance" from her mother, who in the village was regarded as the last genuine trance medium, she replied that she had not, because her mother "was illiterate and knew nothing," whereas what she herself performed "is filmed by television." I encountered exactly the same phenomenon with the elderly violinist Miladin Nikolić from the same village. Before the Second World War, his playing had regularly been used to awaken genuine trance mediums from their ecstatic state, yet in our own time he appeared almost exclusively on stage as a member of the same folklore ensemble. When, in 2008, I asked him to describe the custom as it had been practiced before the war, he merely recounted the stage choreography devised in the 1970s by their village schoolteacher under the title "Rusalia," with which the ensemble had won awards at the Homolje Motifs Festival in Kučevo. In this case, "civilized" Serbianization and Christianization revealed themselves in their ugliest form—as a vulgar act of ethnocidal reshaping of the cultural heritage of a national minority whose traditions, by every accepted principle, ought to have been preserved and cultivated in their authentic form.

54) The reference is to the study of the so-called "Rusalia" phenomenon conducted in Neresnica in 1960 by the physician *Vladimir Jakovljević*. His "post-Freudian," overtly sexist thesis—that the individuals who entered trance were predominantly women with an unsatisfactory sexual life, and that the trance itself represented a form of orgasm [!?] (Jakovljević 1960: 12–13)—has been rejected in more recent studies of the subject as a contradictory case of "researchers imputing their own attitudes to their informants" (Sinani 2009: 112). The more fundamental objection, however, is that individual medical diagnoses, however numerous or accurate they may be, cannot and must not be generalized and attributed to the mental or psychological condition of an entire people.

author). Had he merely asked on what premises Đorđević based his syllogisms, he would have noticed that, in the very same paragraph containing the quoted passage, Đorđević explains his sources by stating that he had "heard in several places among the Romanians that there are men and women who, on certain days, fall into ecstasy and delirium," while a little further on he adds that, when he was a child living in the village of Brestovac near Bor, "***my mother told me*** *about many such cases!*" (emphasis added by Durlić). In other words, he had "heard" something here and there, and something else had been "told to him by his mother." Neither of these forms of "information" is professional, medical, or scientific; rather, they belong to the lowest level of hearsay. It may, however, be said in Đorđević's defense that no branch of science possesses a method by which an entire people can be diagnosed as either insane or sane. For what actually lies at the root of this controversial phenomenon, see Durlić 2020: 167–170.

Another case that deserves close attention is Đorđević's claim that all Vlachs have Serbian customs and, moreover, preserve the Kosovo tradition in the same way as the Serbs, which, according to him, clearly points to their Serbian origin. At the same time, this leads to the extraordinary conclusion that the Vlachs are perhaps the only people in the world who have no customs of their own (Đorđević T. 1922: 96-97). The problem is that Tih. R. Đorđević appears never to have conducted firsthand ethnological research into either Serbian or Vlach customs. His scholarly work consists almost entirely of archival and bibliographical research, while the only descriptions of customs found in his writings were obtained indirectly, secondhand, or through reports sent to him in letters at his own request. Instead of critically rejecting this absurd assertion—that the Vlachs have no customs of their own but merely practice those of others—*Olivera M. Dumić* and *Nebojša D. Đokić* of the *Centre for Political Studies* (?) embraced it enthusiastically. In their paper „Етнички састав становништва у Хомољу у XVIII веку" (*The Ethnic Composition of the Population of Homolje in the Eighteenth Century)*, they invented the existence of certain unnamed "groups" among today's Vlachs who, "for reasons known only to themselves, make excessive efforts to demonstrate differences in church rites and other aspects of life from those of the Serbs, insisting on pagan rituals with which Christianity settled accounts as early as the fourth century"(Dumić-Đokić 2013: 297). According to this interpretation, there exists a kind of conspiratorial circle of authors fabricating Vlach customs solely in order to persuade the Vlachs that they are not Serbs, thereby separating them from the Serbian people and—as the familiar stereotype continues—ultimately attaching them to the Romanians, which is only one step away from the secession of eastern Serbia. They further embellished this absurd thesis with the pure invention that the Vlachs regarded the Serbian epic heroes Prince Marko, Miloš Obilić, and Starina Novak "as their own ancestors" (Ibid.). To support this remarkable claim, the authors shifted responsibility onto Dr. Aćim Medović, district physician of the Požarevac District, and his work published in 1852, in which he writes at the cited passage: "And in Zvižd, where Vlachs now mostly reside, there survives among the people a tradition concerning Voivode Miloš Obilić, who, in accordance with general belief, is remembered for his extraordinary physical strength, while at the same time this tradition maintains that Miloš, as a voivode under Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, governed this part of the Province of Braničevo" (Medović 1852: 195). It is perfectly clear what Medović actually wrote, and equally clear what these two young Serbian scholars attributed to him—most likely guided by patriotic Serbian ethnonarcissism and an even more relaxed understanding of scholarly accuracy, a matter that reflects no less upon the mentors and reviewers who approved their work.[55)] What is in fact preserved in the Braničevo region as the "memory"

55) Let us add here another tendentious falsification by the authorial duo Dimić and Đokić. In their effort to portray the Vlachs as greedy usurpers of the property of indigenous Serbs, they present the inhabitants of the village of Gornjane in the Upper Poreč region as Serbian natives whose property was allegedly "seized" by Vlach

of Miloš Obilić can be seen from the material published by the present author *Vorbara* in the journal *Razvitak* (Zaječar) in 1989 (Durlić 1989: 72-73).

If, however, we were to engage in a serious discussion of Miloš, we would easily arrive at the conclusion that he belongs to the Vlach tradition only as the mythological figure *Miloš Čobanin* ("Miloš the Shepherd"), since no historical person by the name of Miloš Obilić ever existed and, as such, he cannot form part of any people's historical tradition (see Durlić 1988: 78).

Until quite recently, Vlach *lăutari* (traditional folk singers) performed songs about *Marko Kraljević* (see Durlić 2020: 98–104). This tradition, however, is clearly of relatively recent origin and represents a direct consequence of the Serbianization of Vlach folklore. The foundation of Marko's cult is nevertheless Vlach insofar as the Vlachs are heirs to the Thracian cultural heritage, since the word *marko* is of Thracian origin and means "horse." The horse, or *marko*, was a highly revered deity in antiquity (Popov 2000: 125). The underlying basis of the Serbian epic cycle about Marko Kraljević is therefore of Thracian origin, while its association with the Serbian prince arose solely through the coincidental similarity of names, for the historical Marko "performed no historical feat worthy of the admiration of his contemporaries" (Banašević 1935: 185). In other words, the historical figure of Marko Kraljević could in no way have been the source of his extraordinary popularity among the Serbs, Bulgarians, Croats, Romanians, and Albanians; such widespread appeal could only have derived from a myth that had already been deeply rooted throughout the region, such as the Thracian myth of the Divine Horseman. Hence, as Professor Srejović concludes in one of his most perceptive studies, "*Marko Kraljević is known and regarded as a national hero by all the peoples inhabiting this* [Thracian] *territory, and not only by the Slavic peoples*" (Srejović 2002: 83).

As for *Starina Novak*, he was born in Poreč, the predecessor of present-day Donji Milanovac, in 1530. He was a historical figure who is celebrated in Vlach folklore as *Baba Novak*. His greatest military exploits were accomplished in the service of the Vlach voivode Michael the Brave and on the territory of Wallachia. It was also in Wallachia that he met his heroic end in 1601, suffering a gruesome execution—he was roasted alive on a spit by the Hungarians (Jačov 1988: 91)! A monument was later erected there in his honor, making it only natural that he should be celebrated in Vlach folk tradition. The myth that developed around him, blending several historical figures named Novak with multiple layers of legend, has enabled every people on whose territory he fought to honor him out of gratitude, while taking satisfaction in the fact that other peoples honor him as well. The claim that the Vlachs have ever stated that they regard these heroes as their ancestors is nothing more than a pathological fabrication by these two authors, concealed behind an appeal to Đorđević's authority. At the cited passage, however, Đorđević wrote quite explicitly: "*They* [the Vlachs] *tell stories about the old Serbian historical figures—Prince Marko, Miloš Obilić, and Starina Novak—in exactly the same way as the Serbs do*" (Đorđević T. 1924: 97). He says nothing whatsoever about ancestors. Indeed, since the South Slavs adopted these figures from the Balkan cultural substratum, it would be more accurate to say that the Serbs recount Vlach myths in much the same way as the Vlachs do.

settlers from Crna Reka (Dumić–Đokić 2013: 299). The present author carried out a thorough genealogical investigation of Gornjane in 1984, supplementing the results with archival documents and bibliographical sources to reconstruct the village's history. Fortunately for the historical record, Gornjane was neither a Serbian nor an indigenous settlement. It was a typically Vlach village, resettled after a prolonged period of abandonment—as evidenced by Austrian maps—by Vlachs from Almăj in Banat during the 1720s, evidently belonging to the group colonized by Count Mercy. They were subsequently joined by Vlachs from Bessarabia and, later, by other Vlach settlers from various regions. Consequently, the case documented by Tihomir Đorđević on the basis of archival sources (Đorđević 1926: 371–373) involved Vlachs exclusively.

Since heroic figures who belong to Vlach history no less than to Serbian history have already been mentioned, one of the many grave insults and unacceptable judgments that T. Đorđević directs against the Vlachs deserves particular attention—his assessment of them as soldiers. "*The Vlachs are well known as soldiers in our wars*," Đorđević continues in his travelogue. *"It is not the conviction that they should not die for the Serbs that keeps them away from battle and makes them unheroic. No, it is an animal-like cowardice, a complete lack of military pride and chivalric spirit. Cowards in battle, they were equally cowardly when faced with the punishments imposed upon them for such conduct.*" The reason for this blasphemous accusation remains unknown, but anyone who has ever passed through almost any Vlach village in Serbia could hardly fail to notice, in its center, a pyramid-shaped war memorial inscribed with the names of local men who fell in the country's wars. The monument has four sides because a single face would not have been sufficient to accommodate the long lists of those young Vlachs who answered the call of their homeland, Serbia, marched off to war, and never returned to their families. For example, at the very time when Đorđević was writing these brutal slanders, the twelve Vlach villages of the Porečka Reka region had a total male population of 12,848 (Popis 1900: 218). In the wars that followed less than two decades later, 951 of them would lose their lives (Stanković 1983b: 381 ff.). Not one of them retreated from the battlefield, not one was executed as a deserter or a coward. On the contrary, many breathed their last in the arms of Serbian comrades-in-arms. And the reverse was equally true.[56)]

Yet, despite the sacrifice of their lives—many of them falling in their final charge with the name of King Peter on their lips—documents reveal that the King himself was not particularly fond of them. In June 1910, during a visit by a delegation from the Spiritual Court of the Serbian Orthodox Church, King Peter took a particular interest in asking Bishop Milentije about conditions in his diocese and the mood among the Vlachs living there. According to D. Živojinović, the King expressed the opinion "*that efforts should be concentrated there not only by the clergy, but also by teachers and the police authorities. Why*," the King remarked, "*even in the army those Vlachs refuse to speak Serbian, insisting instead on non-commissioned officers who know Romanian*" (Živojinović 1990: 130). [57)] The King was probably unaware of the humiliations that young Vlach recruits endured in his army, since many of them either did not know Serbian or did not fully understand commands given in that language. Those who failed to distinguish between the commands "left" and "right," and consequently stepped off with the wrong foot, were mocked by spiteful *narednici* ("sergeants," as the Vlachs called them), who would tie a bundle of straw to one leg and a bundle of hay to the other. Then, instead of shouting "left-right," they would jeeringly call out after them "pa-

56) A comparison with a passage from Kanitz's *Serbia* illustrates just how biased and unfair Đorđević was in describing the military virtues of the Vlachs of eastern Serbia. Kanitz encountered a group of Vlach recruits at almost exactly the same time that Đorđević was traveling through the region collecting his impressions of the Vlachs. He wrote: *"Near Kučevo I came upon a detachment of Vlach youths on their way to Belgrade for military service. These sons of Mars and descendants of the once-formidable Dacian king Decebalus, resting in colorful groups around their campfires, amused me greatly with their boisterous jokes and playful teasing, which no doubt helped to ease and conceal the pain of parting from their sweethearts. The cheerfulness of these well-built young men never exceeded the bounds of propriety and, in striking contrast to the miserable transports of conscripts in Asiatic Turkey, chained together with iron rings around their necks, here a single gendarme was sufficient to escort all forty young men safely to their destination.*" (Kanitz 1985: 245).

This is not how the sons of fathers supposedly marked by "animal cowardice" march off to serve in the Serbian army.

57) The exact number of ethnic Vlachs who, following their king, survived the Albanian Golgotha will never be known. Yet in every larger Vlach village there were dozens of them. As they grew older, they came to be known in their communities as the *Solunci*—veterans of the Salonika Front—an institution held in the deepest respect. At the same time, however, they became a powerful agent of assimilation in the subsequent ethnic transformation of the Vlachs. (Durlić 2010: 10).

je-fîn" ("hay-straw"), provoking laughter and ridicule from the other soldiers.[58] Suspicion of the Vlachs had already found its way into the royal court during the reign of King Milan (1882–1889), who, incidentally, was himself of Vlach maternal descent, having been born in Mărășești, Moldavia. This, however, brought the Vlachs little benefit. The King's distrust of them was so profound that he rejected a proposed administrative reform of Serbia which included the establishment of district assemblies as an important level of local government, fearing "that in those regions where the Romanian (Vlach) population is more numerous, the people would begin using the Romanian language in schools, in administrative offices, and even in the district assemblies" (Pavlović 2008: 372). By a curious coincidence, this occurred at roughly the same time that the prudent Minister Garašanin replied to Deputy Popović that his proposal concerning minority rights for the Vlachs could expect nothing but a bullet from his pistol.

The examples cited above do not exhaust the list of problematic views on the Vlachs found in the works of Tihomir Đorđević. If these were merely outbursts of ill will and personal animosity, perhaps accompanied by a measure of drawing-room moralizing, the following example should concern everyone, for it strikes directly at the very essence of the position of the Vlach minority and its fundamental human rights, the harmful consequences of which the Vlachs continue to experience to this day. It provides a vivid illustration of the foundation upon which this celebrated scholar constructed his theory of inversion—a theory that permanently separated the Vlachs from the Romanians, to whom they belonged both ethnically and ethnogenetically, regardless of their emotions and historical memory, while never bringing them genuinely closer to the Serbs. Instead, the assimilation process produced among the Vlachs a dual national identity, a subject that will be discussed later. The relevant passage is reproduced here in full.

*"The **tradition** in Ranovac holds that the inhabitants of Ranovac are Serbs who, in ancient times, fled from the Turks to Romania, where they became Romanianized, and later returned to their original homeland. **My colleague**, Mr. Milivoje Bašić, who spent a considerable period as a superintendent of primary schools in the regions of Serbia inhabited by Romanians, **told me** that our Romanians, both Ţărani and Ungureni, **say** that they originated from Kosovo; that in ancient times they had been Serbs; that they went to Hungary, to the **region of Almaș**; that there they became Romanianized; and that from there they returned to Serbia as Romanians, settling in their present places of residence. That, they say, is why they have Serbian first names and surnames, and why their customs and their family patron saint (slava) are Serbian"* (Đorđević T. 1905: 776).

Here, once again, it is enough to observe the same "scientific" procedure employed by a university professor: a *single* "tradition" from *one* village and the "*account*" of *one* colleague are shamelessly generalized to *all* Vlachs, who—*every last one of them!*—are said to have left Kosovo, converged upon a place called *Almaš*, and there undergone *Romanianiza-*

58) While recording Vlach folktales in 1978, I visited the village of Miroč. Knowing no one there, I entered the local tavern, introduced myself to the waiter, and asked him to recommend a good storyteller, since such people are always well known in village communities. He pointed to an elderly man sitting alone in the corner. The old man needed no encouragement. Like others of his generation, he narrated vividly and in great detail, in flawless Vlach. When we had finished, I asked from whom he had learned all those stories, expecting him to mention his parents or other Vlach ancestors. To my surprise, he replied that he was "a pure-blooded Serb from Miroč," but had learned Vlach while serving in the Royal Yugoslav Army. He had been assigned to serve alongside another recruit from Miroč who spoke no Serbian, and their commanding officer ordered him to teach the young Vlach enough Serbian to understand the basic commands. Smiling broadly, the old man concluded: "Well, I never taught him Serbian, but he certainly taught me Vlach!" It was from him that I first heard about the practice of teaching Vlach recruits military commands with the help of hay and straw, a story later confirmed by many other elderly informants. Fortunately, none of them remembered it as an insult; they regarded it simply as a consequence of illiteracy. For that very reason, many of these veterans later became the strongest advocates within their own communities for schooling and for learning the Serbian language.

tion as though it were a kind of collective lobotomy lasting no less than four centuries, or roughly sixteen generations. From this point onward, the entire jumble of assumptions is transformed into a universally valid theory of the origin of an entire people—a theory that, in time, would contribute to that people's disappearance, which, as is evident today, was precisely its purpose. Such a "theory" may perhaps be understood as a short-lived, politically expedient device employed in the behind-the-scenes struggle over state borders at the Peace Conference, where it was the responsibility of the opposing diplomacy to refute it. It cannot, however, be accepted as a serious academic theory grounded in truthful evidence, one that has remained virtually unchallenged for more than a century and has inflicted immeasurable harm upon the Vlachs by striking at the very root of their ethnic identity, splitting it in two and accelerating the process of assimilation. That this "theory" suffers not only from methodological and factual deficiencies, but above all from fundamental logical flaws—where no genuine theory can afford to be vulnerable—was already demonstrated in the book *Vlachs at Sunse*t. Only its central argument will be repeated here:

"In scientific terms, the theory is so weak that it is sufficient to refute its central postulate—the claim that the Vlachs descended from Romanianized Serbs—by demonstrating that this hypothesis is false. The obvious logical question is: if the Vlachs originated from Serbs who became Romanianized over the course of four centuries (fourteenth to eighteenth centuries) while living on Romanian ethnic territory,[59] then why did other groups of those same Serbs, who remained there for an additional two centuries, not undergo the same process? This was, moreover, a period when Romania's assimilative power had become considerably stronger, since both Banat and Transylvania had come under Romanian rule, unlike during the preceding four centuries. Finally, if the inversion theory were scientifically valid, there should not be a single Serb left in Romania today. Fortunately, this is demonstrably not the case, for it is well known that the Serbian diaspora has been preserved better in the Romanian Banat than anywhere else. Once the hypothesis collapses as false, nothing remains of the theory" (Durlić 2020: 32).

As for the "thesis" that the Vlachs of eastern Serbia have borne Serbian first names and surnames ever since "ancient times," does this mean that these Serbian names and surnames somehow survived throughout the entire centuries-long process of Romanianization in "Almaš"? This obvious absurdity merely demonstrates how profoundly contradictory Đorđević's inversion theory is—how completely it conflicts with itself, so much so that it could serve as a textbook example of an *antinomy*. For if the Vlachs of eastern Serbia are indeed *Romanianized Serbs*, how is it that, throughout this centuries-long process of Romanianization, they managed to preserve their "Serbian first names and surnames," their "Serbian customs," and, above all, the quintessential Serbian custom—the *slava* (family patron saint's day)? In what, then, did this supposed "Romanianization" actually consist? Incidentally, not only is there no evidence whatsoever of any complete Romanianization of the Serbs in the Romanian Banat, but there is abundant evidence of Serbian cultural influence upon the Romanian population there, to such an extent that one may even speak of certain elements of the Serbianization of the Banat Romanians.[60] The strongest argument against such claims regarding the supposedly Serbian names of the Vlachs, however, is provided by the old *ha-*

59) Serbian migrations northward into what was then the Kingdom of Hungary began after the Battle of Kosovo (Jireček 1984: 420). A later major migration took place under Despot Vuk Grgurević, known as the Dragon Despot, in 1481, when approximately 50,000 people—mostly from the Požarevac district—crossed the Danube and settled in the vicinity of Timișoara (Đokić 1934: 120). By far the largest and most tragic, however, was the Great Migration of the Serbs in 1690, which virtually depopulated not only Kosovo but much of Serbia as it then existed.

60) Hedeșan (1998: 59) points to the influence of the Serbian *slava* on the Romanian *praznicul căși* in Banat, which, in her view, "has its roots in the Roman cult of the household hearth and the ancestors." Șandru (1937: 145), in turn, emphasizes the strong influence of the Serbian language on the Banat Romanian dialect spo-

raç and *çibuk* tax registers from the period of Prince Miloš's first reign,[61] together with the nineteenth-century population censuses, in which purely Vlach first names and surnames have been preserved. This remained the case until the time when the Serbian Orthodox Church energetically undertook their Serbianization as part of its patriotic mission in the formation of the Serbian nation. Even today, it is enough to open the telephone directory of any Vlach village to recognize numerous surnames of unmistakably Vlach origin, whose roots no process of Serbianization has succeeded in eradicating.

The idea that the Serbian first names and surnames of the Vlachs of eastern Serbia constitute proof of their Serbian origin is an ingenious notion designed to serve a hidden purpose: to *absolve* the Serbian Orthodox Church of responsibility for its treatment of the Vlachs. From the mid-nineteenth century, when it expelled the Vlach clergy, until the communist era under Tito, when it was separated from the state, the Church violated every moral principle, both earthly and divine, by forbidding the Vlachs to give their children their own traditional, centuries-old Vlach names—a moment that, in every culture, is among the most moving elements of baptism. Even more striking in the Vlach case was the prohibition imposed upon Serbian priests in ethnically mixed villages from marrying "*young men who wished to marry Vlach women ... lest the village become completely Romanianized*," as reported by Kanitz (Kanic 1985: 401-402). Đorđević himself does not conceal the Church's deliberate Serbianization of Vlach personal names. After listing a number of Vlach names that he had recorded during his journey through Zlot, he concludes with undisguised satisfaction: "*Through the efforts of the Church, such names are no longer given today; instead, the priests see to it that children receive purely Serbian names*" (Đorđević 1906: 383). Nor should one overlook the cases of the direct suppression and forcible alteration of identity through official instructions requiring priests that, whenever the person concerned was a Vlach, "*in church registers and in forms for state statistics, they should enter in the appropriate columns that the person was of Serbian nationality and Serbian mother tongue*" (Letopis 1928: 72-73). It nevertheless remains unclear why, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the church administration recorded all Vlachs as "Romanian" in the column marked "nationality," only to issue, shortly thereafter, the above-mentioned explicit order requiring that all Vlachs be registered as being of Serbian nationality.

Let us conclude this review of the views of the founder of Serbian ethnology, Tih. R. Đorđević, with one final example that clearly illustrates his double standard. After writing that for the Vlachs "*theft, drunkenness, fornication, and beatings are commonplace*," he continues: "*The women also go to taverns whenever they have money, and they drink until it is all gone. They become so intoxicated that what follows is something that cannot be put down on paper*" (Đorđević T. 1906: 526). Yet, scarcely a hundred pages later, when he arrives in the Serbian village of Bela Reka and witnesses the exuberant St. John's Day festivities, he describes them as "*a veritable uproar and joyful revelry,*" created by "*elderly women returning from gathering herbs, who had drunk a little rakija and were now making merry*." Accompanied by bagpipes and a drum, "*women over forty, flushed with drink, had formed a circle and danced and danced*," while "*the younger people, and even the grandchildren, joined the dance,*

ken in the Almăj region. Many unmistakable Serbian loanwords found today in the speech of the Vlachs of Zvižd (e.g., *ńivă*, *uļiță*, and others) likewise originate from the Almăj dialect of Banat.

61) The 1828 Poll Tax Register ("Arački tefter") for Poreč and the Poreč River District contains not a single individual in the Upper Poreč Vlach villages of Rudna Glava, Crnajka, Gornjane, and Tanda bearing a surname ending in *-ić;* the surnames recorded are entirely Vlach in origin. As an illustration, the following patronymics, recorded in Rudna Glava and formed during the eighteenth century, are listed in the census: *Bačilo, Bala, Balaban, Balan, Barbu, Beker, Biriš, Brjaz, Galbin, Karabaš, Kokoran, Krišan, Krojitor, Kurja, Lapadat, Lucu, Moraru, Olar, Peptan, Pišćol, Punđej, Radu, Repeđe, Tarauz, Truja, Uršika, Venturiš*, and *Vražitor*. (AS, PO K 121/31). Not a single one of these surnames has survived in its original form; today they all end with the Serbian patronymic suffix *-ić*.

everyone singing, shouting, and cheering. The old women were dripping with sweat, partly from the sun and partly from the rakija," and the entire celebration was "*further enlivened by risqué jokes and teasing at the old women's expense*." Đorđević concludes with undisguised delight: "*A spectacle one would not witness even if one were willing to pay for it*" (Ibid: 615-616) Thus, when Vlach women drink, it is portrayed as debauchery and depravity; when Serbian women drink, it becomes a feast for the eyes.

When he wrote *Through Our Romanian*s, Tihomir Đorđević was thirty-seven years old—a man in the full maturity of life—and already held a doctoral degree, earned at the University of Munich with a dissertation on the Roma. In the entire history of Serbian ethnology, only one critical assessment has ever been made of the manner in which Đorđević wrote this work. It came from Dr. Nikola Pantelić of the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts: "*It is evident that T. Đorđević approaches the social relations of eastern Serbia through certain conservative patriarchal-bourgeois prejudices. His attempts to deal with the facts remain at the level of mere description, without any analysis of the material, and consequently his conclusions are forced and based on impressions*" (Pantelić 1969: 307). This was far too little, and far too weak, to undo the lasting consequences that Đorđević's work on the Vlachs bequeathed to Serbian scholarship. All the more so because, in virtually every subsequent work by other authors, Đorđević's views continue to be accepted, reproduced, and cited *a priori*, without comment or critical examination.

Incidentally, it is little consolation to criticize the assumptions from which Đorđević *proceeded* if no one has challenged, with a single substantive argument, the conclusions at which he ultimately *arrived*—conclusions with which the deeply stigmatized Vlachs have been forced to live in Serbia for more than a century. It is remarkable that none of the fervent Serbian intellectuals who devoted themselves to the aggressive and often tasteless Serbianization of the Vlachs ever paused to ask how all this was experienced by those on the other side, or whether it is possible to compel an entire people to abandon its identity, renounce everything that is its own, and become someone else simply because others wish it to do so?

b) The Jovan Erdeljanović Episode

To complete the picture of the Vlachs as they appeared in the eyes of Serbian ethnologists during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it is necessary to recall here Đorđević's colleague at the Faculty, Professor *Jovan Erdeljanović*, PhD. Only with his contribution, it seems, does the overall picture become fully intelligible. This is all the more important because Erdeljanović is regarded in the history of Serbian ethnology as the father of modern *scientific* ethnology, and one would therefore expect his work to display greater objectivity and less personal bias. Yet the logic of national scholarship follows rules of its own!

In examining "the ethnic fusion of the old Balkan population with the incoming Slavs," Erdeljanović argued that certain "specific psychological traits" found among the latter had arisen under the far from beneficial influence of the indigenous Balkan inhabitants. These included "*pronounced egotism, reserve and distrustfulness, narrowness of mind and harshness, a lack of pride, an insufficiently developed imagination, an unusually strong inclination toward material gain, and consequently great industriousness, endurance, miserliness, and the like*" (Erdeljanović 1924: 373). Put simply, the supposedly "pure Aryan" race of the South Slavs—or, as Erdeljanović euphemistically called it, the "fair-complexioned" immigrant population (Ibid: 379) —was, in his view, corrupted through admixture with the atavistic race of the native inhabitants. It must be acknowledged that this amounts to little more than a milder version of the racial doctrines found in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. According to Erdeljanović, the source of this danger lay in the Carpathians, where "*from a relatively small*

group of Vlach shepherds" there had emerged a "[Romanian] *people of some twelve million souls*," a nation that continued to expand. He therefore considered it necessary to warn that "the danger of Romanian expansion from the Carpathians has not been eliminated. It remains ever present and is preparing to advance once again upon the remaining Serbian part of Banat." As a responsible Serbian intellectual, he proposed the following remedy: "*It might perhaps be successfully countered only by a well-organized and properly directed Dinaric wave of Serbian settlement*" (Ibid: 383). Thus Erdeljanović, otherwise a convinced evolutionist, ultimately converged with Đorđević. While Erdeljanović maintained that the Romanian people, as a pastoral population at a lower cultural level, constituted a permanent threat to the South Slavs and should therefore be contained through a well-organized policy of demographic settlement by demographically expanding Dinaric Serbs, Đorđević, through a series of "practical" examples, sought to demonstrate that the Vlachs of eastern Serbia, as an ethnic branch of the Romanian people, represented precisely that atavistic element—a concrete threat because they had already penetrated deeply into the body of the Serbian nation and the territory of the Serbian state.

Although they never stated this explicitly, one cannot help but conclude that Serbian patriots of their persuasion would have been immensely pleased had the Vlachs somehow left "Serbian soil" and returned to the land from which they had come. What we encounter here is an epidemic of *nationalism* carried to racial extremes, affecting a considerable segment of a people's intellectual elite at the very historical moment when that people was transforming itself into a modern nation. Since the very concept of a nation is inseparably linked to that of the state (a nation being commonly understood as a *people that has established its own state*), it is understandable why Serbian intellectuals of that period—from artists and scholars to senior church dignitaries—displayed such extraordinary sensitivity toward everything that was not ethnically Serbian, especially toward the minorities of the defeated nations: Germany, Hungary, and Turkey. These minorities genuinely posed a political challenge to the new state, for the defeated powers sought, through them, to restore the previous political order. The Vlachs, however, found themselves on that blacklist because, after the Paris Peace Conference, it became clear that Romania—as the self-proclaimed successor of the Eastern Roman Empire—might succeed in winning them over and, if it did, would attempt to use them in support of its by no means insignificant territorial ambitions. For that reason, the Vlachs were consistently kept in the status of an unrecognized minority, which in practice meant keeping them as far as possible from Romanian influence. At the same time, an aggressive policy of assimilation sought to instill in them the belief that they were in fact Serbs who had merely "forgotten who they were" at one point in history, and that by becoming Serbs once again they would lose none of the rights enjoyed by a minority, since they would automatically pass from minority to majority status, with all the rights belonging to the majority people.

c) The Cvijić–Đorđević Nexus and the Question of the Vlachs' Time of Settlement

The time at which a people settles in a territory where another people is in the process of establishing its own state is by no means an insignificant issue. We have already seen how Cvijić acted at the Paris Peace Conference, where he advanced the grossly false claim that the Vlachs had settled in eastern Serbia only in the nineteenth century, and only after the Serbs had liberated that region from Ottoman rule. That he consciously distorted the facts—including those he himself had previously established—is confirmed by his celebrated work *The Balkan Peninsula*, first published in Paris in French a year before the Peace Conference, on the basis of lectures he had delivered at the Sorbonne at the University's invitation (Cvijić 1918). According to the 1987 edition prepared by the Serbian Academy of Sciences

and Arts (SANU) from the translation by the University of Belgrade professors Erdeljanović and Drobnjaković, Cvijić's original position was as follows:

- On the indigenous population: *"In eastern Serbia, north of Rtanj, in the basins of the Crna Reka, the Great Timok, the Pek, and the Mlava rivers, there are very few indigenous inhabitants, descendants of the medieval Timok–Braničevo population."*

- On the depopulation: *"There was a period—apparently during the second half of the seventeenth century—when these regions were almost completely deserted."*

- On the settlement: *"The overwhelming majority of the present population settled there in the late seventeenth and during the eighteenth century."*

- On the sequence of settlement: *"The first to arrive in the almost deserted basins north of Rtanj were the Kosovci, who settled wherever they wished."*

- On their descendants: *"Their descendants constitute the principal Serbian population of the Zaječar region (the large villages of Rgotina, Vražogrnac, Zvezdan, Bela Reka, etc.), as well as of Homolje, Resava, Zvižd, and other areas."*

- On the settlement of the Vlachs: *"The greater part of the Vlach population arrived after the Kosovci, coming from Almaš in Banat and from Transylvania; they are known as Ungureni, while those who came from Wallachia are called Ţărani."* (Cvijić 1987: 170).

Before commenting on these propositions, let us add what Đorđević himself wrote about the time of the Vlach migration. After noting that the regions of eastern Serbia had become depopulated during the second half of the seventeenth century, he continues:

- *"Little by little, these regions began to be resettled by migrants from the southwestern and southern Serbian lands. Streams of these settlers reached as far as what is now western Bulgaria."*

- On the settlement of the Vlachs: *"At approximately the same time began the first migrations of Romanians from Wallachia and Banat into northeastern Serbia"* (Đorđević 1923: 166).

It is evident that, for Cvijić, there was no doubt as to who had arrived first and who later: priority was unequivocally assigned to the Kosovo Serbs, without the support of any specific evidence, but rather on the tacit assumption that every national scholarship serves the interests of politics; that, in the turbulent period of nation-building, its nature is one of *ketman*—adapting itself to the prevailing political winds. His additional remark that these Serbs have descendants in eastern Serbia, specifically in the Serbian villages around Zaječar, is irrelevant to the question of when their ancestors actually settled there. Likewise, nowhere in this work does he claim that the Vlachs arrived only in the nineteenth century, after these regions had been liberated from Ottoman rule; that assertion would emerge only later, once Romanian territorial aspirations had become publicly known. Đorđević, for his part, was somewhat more cautious, maintaining—again without offering any supporting evidence—that the migrations took place "*at approximately the same time*." It should also be noted that no one could have migrated "from Romania," since *Romania* did not yet exist as a state at that time; the correct designation would have been *Wallachia*.

While most of Cvijić's conclusions may be regarded as broadly acceptable (concerning the indigenous population, the period of depopulation, and, to some extent, the descendants of the Kosovci in the vicinity of Zaječar), it should nevertheless be pointed out that there is additional evidence which sheds considerably more light on the time of settlement of both groups.

As we have already seen, the colonization of the Vlachs from Banat is mentioned in historical sources as early as the first years of Austrian rule. It was carried out by Count Mercy on the orders of Prince Eugene of Savoy. This is confirmed by Mercy's report of 20 October 1722, in which he states that, on two separate occasions, he had brought a total of

3,200 families from Banat and settled them in the area between the Timok River and Kučajna (Pantelić 1948: 12, fn. 29. See Map No 2), although concern over the "mass migration into the Timok region" of the dissatisfied population of Banat had already been recorded in a report from Timișoara at the end of 1718 (Petrović N. 1974: 37). It is also worth recalling that, in certain regions, the Vlachs long preserved the memory of having settled there "during the time of Prince Eugene" (Popović K. 1867: 83; Milićević 1876: 922), whereas no comparable tradition has been recorded in Serbian villages. Had the area already been settled by a Serbian population, such a colonization would not have taken place, for organized colonization was undertaken only in territories that were deserted or genuinely sparsely inhabited.

On the other hand, the first historical evidence of the settlement of the Serbs in eastern Serbia after the Great Migration—more precisely, in the Crna Reka region, which is explicitly mentioned in the sources—dates only from the migration led by Arsenije Jovanović Šakabenta in 1737 (Durlić 2010: 7; Grujić 1914: 193). Further support for the later arrival of the ancestors of today's Serbian population in the Crna Reka region is provided by the observations made in the field by the distinguished traveler Felix Kanitz: "*The Serbs living along the Krivi Vir section of the Timok River, upstream from the Čestobrodica Pass—as I heard there on several occasions—settled here from Old Serbia some 150 years ago and, as I have personally verified*, ***still preserve the names of their native places, their clans, and so forth***" (Kanic 1985: 425). Since Kanitz recorded this toward the end of the nineteenth century, even allowing for the approximate dating typical of oral tradition, it is more than evident that he was referring to a population that had arrived at the time of Šakabenta's migration, for which, as we have seen, written evidence also exists, rather than in 1690, as is claimed in certain monographs (See Zvezdan 2005: 48-49). There is, in fact, no evidence that any branch of the Great Migration of 1690 ended its journey anywhere within Serbia, let alone that it turned far to the east and settled in the Crna Reka region, as Marinko Stanojević conjectured without any documentary support (Stanojević 1937: 59). Quite the contrary: at the very time when the masses of Serbian refugees were moving north across the Danube, the Ottoman army, whose atrocities had provoked the migration, was returning to Istanbul in two columns: one along the so-called Danube Route (Smederevo–Majdanpek–Vidin), and the other along the Imperial Road to Constantinople—precisely the routes that would also have had to be taken by any group of refugees from Kosovo had they broken away from the main body led by the Patriarch with the intention of settling in the Crna Reka region (Cf. Katić T. 2012: 125 ff.). Moreover, written sources indicate that the refugee movement of 1690 was joined by inhabitants from the territory between the Morava and Timok rivers, specifically from Požarevac and Zaječar (Đorđević T. 1984: 92), not to mention the fact that the refugees from Resava carried with them the greatest sacred relic of the Serbian people, preserved in the Monastery of Ravanica: the relics of Prince Lazar. When the clergy flee en masse, it is difficult to imagine that many of their parishioners would have dared remain behind, let alone that anyone would have chosen such a region as a place of settlement. Finally, the most important point should be added: the migration of 1690 was directed northward with the aim of reaching as quickly as possible the protection promised by the Habsburg Court in Vienna, which at that moment exercised no authority whatsoever over the Crna Reka region. The view that the ancestors of the Serbs of Crna Reka were an offshoot of the Kosovo refugees of the Great Migration is therefore untenable. Their settlement should instead be dated approximately half a century later and connected with Šakabenta's migration. Such a revision would reverse the sequence of settlement, which Cvijić appears to have asserted with little supporting evidence, and would establish a substantial chronological priority for the Vlachs arriving from Wallachia, and especially from Banat.

Why it matters so much who first settled a particular territory usually becomes apparent only in troubled times, when historical truth is reduced to a piece of cloth that everyone pulls to his own side.

d) The Jovan Đokić Episode: The Apex of Anti-Vlachism

The Serbian district physician Dr. Jovan Đokić earned his place in this survey through his book "*Кроз насеља с. и. Србије, Баната и суседних крајева*" ("Through the Settlements of Southeastern Serbia, Banat, and the Neighboring Regions") (Đokić 1934), which represents, without rival, the culmination of Serbian anti-Vlach zealotry. It may well serve as a textbook example of the practical application of the inversion theory advanced by Tihomir Đorđević and Jovan Cvijić, as well as Erdeljanović's theory concerning the threat to the racial purity of the Serbs. Both Đokić's book and Đokić himself illustrate the influence these theories exerted upon Serbian patriots in the interwar period, when many saw themselves in the chivalrous role of defenders of Serbian national identity, supposedly endangered above all by "Romanianism" or "Vlachism." The central part of the book consists of examples of the "stubbornness" ("jogunstvo") of the "Serb-Vlachs," as Đokić calls them, who, although they knew the language, allegedly refused to speak Serbian. As a result, according to him, the municipal authorities in ethnically mixed villages were compelled to conduct official communication exclusively in the Vlach language, particularly through the announcements of the village crier proclaiming the daily public notices.

Đokić's central thesis is that such an allegedly unnecessary use of the Vlach language was leading the Serbian nation toward ruin. Accordingly, he states the purpose of his book in the following words: "*We hope that these observations and recollections will enable the reader to gain a clear understanding of how much negligence and lack of foresight on our part have contributed to the national decline of our people, allowing so many of our villages, in the course of time, to become Vlachized*" (Idem: 351).

Đokić's methodological approach is remarkably original. He takes the results of a century of intensive assimilation, Serbianization, and Christianization of the Vlachs as proof of their Serbian origin. "*In confirmation of this*," he writes, "*that the inhabitants of these [Vlach] villages are of Serbian origin, one need only look at many of their Serbian customs, such as the slava, for which the Romanians use the Serbian word 'praznik' ('feast day'). Furthermore, there are their distinctly Serbian family names and surnames, such as Stojanović, Stevanović, Mitrović, Radosavljević, Petrović, Bogdanović, Đorđević, Milojević, Dragić, and others*" (Đokić 1934: ibidem). It is not necessary to prove that these surnames ending in -ić were assigned to the Vlachs by Serbian priests and the Serbian civil administration, acting on the instructions of the church and state authorities. It is undoubtedly true that the so-called theory of imitation of the prominent Serbian families of "Odžaković" and "Kolenović" also played a certain role among the Vlach peasantry in becoming Serb. Yet this was only one small cog in the larger machinery of acculturation, within which the relentless wheel of assimilation crushed and ground down everything in its path.

In addition to these "examples," the book is packed with excerpts from the works of well-known Serbian and foreign authors of the time, who seemed to compete with one another in portraying the Romanians in the darkest possible light—disparaging, belittling, and humiliating them. Đokić reproduced almost verbatim all the "epithets" with which Tihomir Đorđević had adorned the Vlachs, supplementing them with carefully selected passages from the works of his colleague *Dr. Stevan Mačaj* (Idem: 235-236), while adding his own "specialties" whenever the opportunity arose. He also consistently sought to portray the Vlachs as a primitive people remaining at a lower stage of development, whereas the Serbs were presented as a superior, noble, and cultured race, from whose coexistence the Vlachs

could be expected to derive considerable cultural advancement. He concluded his panegyric to the Serbs with the pathetically exaggerated assertion that "*nowhere in the world is there a greater cavalier than the Serb,*" and that in courtesy they even surpass the French themselves (Idem: 333). Finally, Đokić openly endorsed the ethno-biological method proposed by leading Serbian scholars as the solution to the problems of "Vlachism" and "Romanianism":

"In order that our people in northeastern Serbia and Banat may become ethnically homogeneous in those areas where they live intermingled with our Serb-Vlachs, and in order that all the admirable racial qualities of our people may be further perfected in those settlements, as well as to achieve a stronger national and spiritual unification—as Dr. Jovan Cvijić has stated—a well-organized program of internal colonization from the Dinaric regions of our state is required, accompanied by vigorous cultural propaganda in those areas threatened by foreign races. The distinguished scholar Dr. J. Erdeljanović, as we have seen, shares the same opinion" (Idem: 297).

The book's hidden purpose, however, was something quite different. Its grotesque content was designed to invert, distort, and conceal an actual social reality, so that the victim might be portrayed as the oppressor. It was not the Vlachs who were endangered by the Serbs through aggressive assimilation and the denial of minority rights; on the contrary, the Serbs were presented as the ones supposedly threatened by Vlach "atavism" and "obstinacy" (jogunstvo), and above all by their "fertility"—that is, by the high birth rate allegedly resulting from the Balkan "lack of civilization," which, according to this view, endowed them with "a particular assimilative power over the immigrant South Slavs" (Idem: 298).

If scholarly studies rarely reached the Vlachs because they were published in specialized journals circulating mainly within a narrow circle of experts, pamphlets such as this certainly did—although most often only among the educated urban Vlachs, many of whom had already been largely assimilated into the Serbian population. Their only response was to draw even closer to the Serbs, concealing what they had come to regard as their own "shameful" origin. Their descendants may still preserve yellowed copies of this perverse book among the family heirlooms stored in old wooden chests. It was at that time that the psychological defense mechanism known as *identification with the aggressor*—or, in contemporary terminology, *internalized self-hatred (auto-chauvinism)*—began to exact its toll upon the Vlachs.

The Authorities' Campaign Against the "Undesirable" Traditional Folk Costume

To the Serbian authorities of the nineteenth century, the Vlachs were objectionable not only because of their supposed temperament, disposition, or character, but also because of their appearance. Particular elements of both male and female traditional dress became targets of the Serbian elite as early as the reign of Prince Miloš. An aesthetic guillotine, in the form of scissors wielded by gendarmes who could scarcely be credited with the manners of gentlemen, descended upon the shaggy Vlach fur caps and the elegant women's headdresses crowned with the distinctive *čepec*, which the Vlachs had proudly worn for centuries as symbols of wealth and social standing, and which Vlach women also cherished as an expression of feminine beauty.

The new authorities understood none of this. Indeed, their official orders amounted to an admission that their campaign against the "undesirable" costume was motivated largely by the belief that it was simply ugly. "*The Vlach women of Homolje and Zvižd still retain their ugly costume, especially the one worn on the head*," wrote Milićević in 1876, adding by way of explanation: "*It is that grotesque konjga (stuffed with wool instead of hair), covered with a white embroidered cloth that resembles a kind of foot-wrap. Over the middle of the forehead they fasten yet another braided band, making themselves look even more unsightly*" (Mi-

lićević 1876: 1076). The same aesthetic justification was invoked much later, when the state undertook similar "beautification" campaigns against the women of the Torlak region in the Timok Valley. Although health considerations were occasionally mentioned, the women's headdress with *trvelji* was denounced primarily as a "monstrosity" that "disfigures the person who wears it," while the medical argument claimed that the *trvelji*, "by pressing too tightly upon the head, prevent it from being exposed to the air, thereby causing various illnesses and uncleanliness" (Stanojević M. 1931: 89). The fact that these headdresses had not troubled their wearers in the slightest for centuries was of no concern to the obstinate authorities; still less did they care that such measures humiliated and insulted the Vlachs. How the Vlachs themselves perceived these actions may be seen in *Vorbar* under the entries *puort ńidorit* ("undesirable costume"), *śapsă* ("čepec"), and related terms. This deplorable practice of using gendarmes' scissors to sever tradition by force and alter an ethnic identity was not invented by the Serbian authorities; it had been inherited from the Ottomans. They quickly forgot, however, that the Ottomans had employed such measures in order to humiliate the Serbs and keep them in subjugation (Aranđelović-Lazić 1966: 21-52). Perhaps this explains why, in certain instances, Serbian gendarmes behaved more brutally toward elderly Vlach men and women—among whom the prohibited costume survived the longest—than the Turks themselves might have done. According to contemporary testimony, the shock was all the greater because such treatment was expected from the Turks, but never from Serbian gendarmes.

Vlachs Under Police Surveillance

Cutting off the shaggy fur caps and singeing the *čepec* was by no means the only task assigned to the police. The decisive turning point, in fact, came with the appearance of the Romanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, where it openly advanced far-reaching territorial claims to a substantial part of the Serbian state. Romania based these claims on the ethnic principle, arguing that the region was inhabited by Vlachs whom it regarded as its own co-nationals. According to the Romanian interpretation of Wilson's principles, the Vlachs of eastern Serbia were entitled to autonomy, including the right to unite territorially with Romania as their mother state, although Wilson's principles applied to the autonomy of peoples within the former Habsburg Monarchy, not to national minorities.[62)] As already noted, Romania deliberately abandoned further insistence on this "right," concentrating instead all its efforts on the question of the Romanian minority in Banat, which at the time it evidently considered either more important or an easier "prize" than eastern Serbia. Because of these territorial aspirations, the Yugoslav security authorities directed their attention primarily toward Romania and its activities, as well as toward individual Vlachs suspected of having come under the influence of Romanian propaganda. In addition, periodic assessments of the situation in the Vlach regions were prepared and submitted to the competent authorities, often in the form of analytical reports accompanied by recommendations for further action.[63)]

62) On 8 January 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson issued his famous Fourteen Points, in which Point 10 declared: "The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development." Woodrow Wilson, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress on Great War Aims (Fourteen Points)," January 8, 1918; Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46; National Archives, Washington, D.C. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-woodrow-wilsons-14-points.

63) The Archives of Yugoslavia preserve a confidential "Report on the National Character of the Boljevac County," drawn up on 12 September 1932. After listing the situation village by village, with descriptions of individual cases that deviated from the ideal pattern framed within a Serbian national context, the report concludes that "from all that has been presented, it follows that the national character not only of Boljevac County but also of a large part of the Timok Krajina is endangered... The Serbs are paying a blood tax to those inferior to themselves." According to this report, the numerical predominance of the Vlachs was "the product of the inactivity and errors of the administrative and educational authorities," since "in every government office all officials immediately accommodate every 'Vlach' and speak to him in Vlach, whereas they ought to be compelled to speak Serbian." (AJ, 66, 71/185).

It appears, however, that there were not many individuals recruited in this way. In other words, although Romanian propaganda remained active, it found little resonance among the Vlachs of eastern Serbia. The meticulous J. Đokić, by the time he completed the manuscript of his book (published in 1934), had managed to collect only thirteen such "cases," which he carefully numbered with Roman numerals (Đokić 1934: 379-388), all occurring over a period of somewhat less than a century. Judging by the nature of his book and its political purpose, had there been a hundred such cases, this author would certainly not have omitted a single one. The situation with certain other minorities was considered far more serious. Indeed, the military authorities prohibited the publication of the results of the 1931 census relating to mother tongue and religion for "*foreign-policy and military reasons*," above all in order to conceal the actual numbers of Hungarians, Germans, and Albanians, whose demographic strength was believed likely to encourage their fifth-column activities. It was for this reason that these minorities were regarded as particularly dangerous (Bjelajac 1989: 85; 89).[64)]

A closer examination of the cases listed by Đokić reveals that the overwhelming majority of the alleged offenses consisted of individual Vlachs who "spoke Romanian" at certain public gatherings, possessed one or more Romanian books, promoted the "Romanian idea," listened to Romanian radio broadcasts, and the like. All of these activities would have been entirely normal—indeed, entirely legitimate—had the Vlachs been recognized as a national minority and granted the rights that such a status entails.

As is well known, the "threefold" ("trojedna") Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed like a house of cards during the April War of 1941. Fortunately, the Vlachs of eastern Serbia, as loyal citizens of the Kingdom, in no way contributed to its downfall.

The Vlachs in the Clutches of Romanian Irredentism

With the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Vlachs of eastern Serbia entered one of the most significant periods of their history. Although it lasted only a short time, and has today been almost forgotten, it left profound and lasting political and psychological consequences for an entire generation of Vlachs, after which nothing was ever quite the same again. This was the phenomenon that Serbian historians came to describe as the "Romanian irredentist movement."[65)]

The term irredentism derives from Italian. In that language, irredenta means "unredeemed" or "not yet liberated," while the phrase Italia irredenta literally means "Unredeemed Italy" (Vujaklija 1980, s.v. *Iredenta).* It originated as the name of a political doctrine and movement that emerged in Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the newly unified Italian state sought the annexation of territories in neighboring countries inhabited by Italian-speaking populations. Italy regarded these populations as its national minority, and the irredentist movement consequently claimed a right to the territories they inhabited. Irredentism therefore invariably amounts to territorial claims

64) Fortunately for the history of Serbian statistics, the original census materials fell into the hands of the German occupation authorities and were published in Vienna in 1943 in German (Krallert 1943). The German editors noted the striking decline in the number of Timok Romanians—from 147,248 to 57,330—which they attributed to "*offensichtlichen Zählungsterror bewirkten Abnahmen*" ("declines obviously brought about by census coercion"). This explanation, however, should not be accepted uncritically. A sound assessment will be possible only after the complete census material has been examined and the number of Vlachs recalculated on the basis of the standard Vlach regions and compared with the results of the 1921 census. (Ibid: 3).

65) The term was introduced in 1966 by the Serbian historian Dragoljub Petrović, who presented himself in the daily press of the time as the leading "expert" on the Vlachs of eastern Serbia. His entire scholarly output, however, demonstrated that even historians of a Marxist orientation had advanced no further in their understanding of the Vlachs than the physician Dr. Jovan Đokić. (See Petrović D. 1966).

against a neighboring state, justified on national, ethnic, or historical grounds. Romanian irredentism fully conforms to this definition. Its territorial aspirations were directed toward eastern Serbia and Banat as integral parts of the sovereign Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although it erupted abruptly during the April War in Yugoslavia in 1941, its first serious manifestations had already appeared at the time of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. There are even indications that it had been "awake" as early as Romania's struggle for independence during the Berlin Congress of 1878,[66] which, if confirmed, would place its origins in an intriguing chronological parallel with Italian irredentism, which emerged at approximately the same time.

How the Vlachs Became Entangled in Romanian Irredentism in 1941?

When the armed forces of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated, the partition of the country began. Historical circumstances had finally converged in such a way that every interested party was given an opportunity to reveal its true character and expose its long-concealed ambitions. The manner in which Yugoslavia was dismembered is well known. Romania, by then deeply immersed in fascism as one of Hitler's satellite states, did not miss its opportunity either. Unlike the other participants, however, it did not send its troops across the border or invade the occupied country.

Following the capitulation of the Royal Yugoslav Army, many Vlachs from eastern Serbia serving in its ranks as members of the Timok Division fell into German captivity. General Antonescu, then Prime Minister of Romania, seized the opportunity to persuade Hitler not to send these Vlachs to Germany, as he did the Serbian prisoners, but instead to separate them from the Serbs and transfer them to Romanian internment camps, several of which were located in the vicinity of Bucharest and Timişoara.[67] Hitler agreed, and to ensure that the separation was carried out successfully, an unusual method was employed, according to the former prisoners. A mixed Romanian-German commission moved from one soldier to the next as they stood patiently in line, asking each man a brief question containing a Serbian word and waiting for him to translate it into Vlach.[68] They would say "sun," and the soldier would answer *suare*; to the next they would say "water," and he would promptly reply *apa*... There were many Serbs among the prisoners. Those from ethnically mixed villages had little difficulty answering, since they all knew at least some Vlach, but there were also many who were hearing the language for the first time. As soon as word spread of what the camp authorities intended to do, the Vlachs organized a crash course in the Vlach language for them. Yet if someone in the line still hesitated and the commission immediately declared him "a Serb" and began pulling him out of the ranks, the Vlachs would leap forward and shout in unison that he was actually a Vlach from a poor family whose parents had sent him as a small child to serve in the household of wealthy Serbs, causing him to forget his native language. The man would then be returned to the line without further question. The former

66) We may judge this from an order issued by General Antonescu to his Minister of Foreign Affairs on 28 May 1941, instructing him to examine the archives and obtain documents dating from the time of the Congress of Berlin that might provide a historical basis for Romanian irredentist claims. Among other things, Antonescu wrote: *"Îmi amintesc că am văzut undeva că în 1878 ni s-a oferit Timocul şi l-am refuzat. Ce este adevărat în această privinţă?"* ("I seem to recall having seen somewhere that in 1878 the Timok region was offered to us, but that we refused it. What is the truth of this matter?")(Ţurlea 2012: 97).

67) The separation of prisoners of war according to nationality and religion was permitted under the 1929 Geneva Convention. In the Yugoslav case, however, Hitler had additional motives for isolating the Serbs from members of other ethnic groups. Serbian prisoners were sent to the harshest German POW camps, whereas many members of the country's national minorities were released and allowed to return home.

68) Unless otherwise indicated, all details concerning the lives of Yugoslav prisoners in the Romanian camps are based on notes I recorded during interviews conducted on several occasions in the 1970s with *Žarko Trailović* (b. 1915) of Rudna Glava, one of the German prisoners transferred through Bulgaria to the Odaia camp on the outskirts of Turnu Măgurele, and in the 1990s with *Janko Blagojević* (b. 1934) of Jasikovo, whose father, Dumitru, remained in the German prisoner-of-war camp in Belgrade.

prisoners recall with a smile that the camp authorities treated such men with particular favor and kindness. The operation of gathering the prisoners and separating the Vlachs from the Serbs lasted for three weeks (Ţurlea 2012: 80).

The question arises: what was Romania trying to achieve by doing this? Until relatively recently, the true motive remained a matter of speculation, but after the Romanian historian Petre Ţurlea published archival documents in 2012 (Ţurlea 2012), the answer became perfectly clear. It is well known that the Vlachs in these camps were subjected to intensive propaganda and indoctrination, yet this campaign appears very differently from the Serbian and the Vlach perspectives. For Serbian authors, influenced by Đorđević's inverted theory, it was nothing less than the shameless Romanianization of Serbs through coercion to declare themselves Romanians, since, in their view, these were "all Serbs who spoke the Vlach language" (Petrović D. 1966: 34; Blagojević 2006: 174). For the Vlachs themselves, however, this was far from the case. What has consistently been overlooked is that a Vlach, in his own native language, regardless of which Romanian dialect he speaks, has from time immemorial called himself *Rumîn*, exactly as every Romanian peasant throughout Romania calls himself. Therefore, when asked in Romanian, *eşti Rumîn or Sîrb?* ("Are you a Romanian or a Serb?"), he would naturally reply without hesitation, *ĭo mis Rumîn*—"I am a Romanian." Not one of the several thousand Vlach prisoners would have felt that he had in any way changed his ethnic identity or betrayed anything or anyone; on the contrary, he would simply have been expressing the most elementary truth about himself in his own language. Yet when these same Vlachs, showered with every possible kindness by their hosts in the prisoner-of-war camps, were asked whether they wished to be united with the Romanian "motherland" and live together with their "brothers" north of the Danube, as noted earlier, they answered in unison: Nici mort! — literally, "not even dead"; in English, "I'd rather die!"

Existential Consciousness: The Matrix and Queen of Consciousness

It was not because they were somehow privileged Serbs whose awakened patriotism bound them to that state. Rather, it was because of their *existential consciousness*, shaped over generations of Vlachs after their ancestors had migrated from Wallachia and Banat to eastern Serbia. It should be remembered that these were people from the very bottom of society—the dregs, the personal property of the boyars in Wallachia and the feudal landlords in Banat, worthy of Aristotle's definition of the slave as "a living tool that speaks." What nostalgia could such a life possibly leave in human memory? What emotions could a person preserve after freeing himself from such an existence forever? And what happens when that emptiness of memory is replaced by a happiness in the new homeland beyond anything they had ever imagined? When a man who had possessed nothing in the "old homeland" except his bare life could, in the "new homeland," settle wherever he wished, cultivate as much land as he desired and was able to work—not land taken from anyone else, but land he adopted like an abandoned orphan, cleared with his own hands, and marked out for himself and for the generations yet to be born there... Then the memory of the "old homeland" becomes little more than a grotesque anecdote, while the "new homeland" engraves itself so deeply into a person's very being that he would never abandon it—not even in death.

Only someone born in the countryside who has owned land can truly understand the profound emotional bond that develops between a piece of the Earth and the person who possesses it. That is one's homeland—the native land with all its colors, scents, sounds, and memories. It is the only world in which a human being truly exists, in which he exists in the fullest sense of the word; everywhere else on the planet he is merely a guest and a passerby. That is why the Principality of Wallachia—and later Romania itself—could never replace the fullness of existential consciousness that bound the Vlachs irrevocably to the soil of ea-

stern Serbia as to their true home. *Existential consciousness is the matrix of all consciousness because every other form of consciousness springs from it; it is also the queen of consciousness because it alone governs every form of human thought and behavior.*

It is worth emphasizing that whenever we refer here to the Vlachs of eastern Serbia, we mean the peasant, the herdsman, or the farmer whose mental world remained untouched by book learning and was shaped solely by the impulses of nature and by personal experience.

The Cunning Deception with the Signatures

Men of this mindset, once selected, were sent as prisoners of war to Romanian military camps. There, however, they lived under a regime of "semi-freedom," being assigned to villages surrounding the camps, where, under military supervision, they assisted local farmers. The Romanian General Staff considered this arrangement necessary "until the formalities required for sending them back to their homes had been completed," while at the same time believing that this opportunity "should be used to undertake actions aimed at reviving and strengthening the national consciousness of these brethren" (Ţurlea 2012: 79). These efforts were carried out on a large scale and with great intensity. It may well be said that the young Vlachs, most of whom had never seen a theatre performance, a concert, or any similar cultural event, scarcely knew what had happened to them. Some of the unmarried men found kindred spirits there, and it was said that a few chose to remain in Romania permanently. The overwhelming majority, however, decided to return home.

The former prisoners recall that, before being released, they were asked to sign a number of lists, assuming that these were merely routine formalities required for leaving the military camp and returning home from a foreign country. The surviving documents, however, reveal something entirely different, casting a completely new light on the whole affair and giving it a character that can, without exaggeration, be described as *shocking*. These are lists of "Timok" prisoners from several camps. One comes from the camp at *Remetea*, near Timişoara, containing the names of 461 prisoners, most of them from the Vlach villages of the Mlava region—*Manastirica, Stamnica, Starčevo, Dubočka*, and *Rašanac*—but also from the neighboring Serbian villages of *Šapine, Ćirikovac*, and *Petka* (Ibid: 393-409). This is followed by a list from the nearby camp at *Bukovac*, containing 473 prisoners, mainly from the Zvižd villages of *Voluja, Ševica*, and *Neresnica*, but also from the neighboring regions of Stig and Braničevo (Ibid: 412-426). A third list comes from the camp at Curcani, about fifty kilometers southeast of Bucharest, containing the names of 296 prisoners recorded on a highly disordered and barely legible list (Ibid: 449-458). The camp at *Odaia*, near Turnu Măgurele on the Danube, opposite the historic town of Nikopol in Bulgaria, had the longest list of signatories. It contained exactly 1,324 names from almost every Vlach village in the Negotin Krajina, Crna Reka, and Poreč regions—but, quite surprisingly, also a large number of names from the entirely Serbian villages of *Čubra, Jasenica, Vidrovac, Brestovac, Šarkamen, Klenovac, Brusnik, Popovica*, and *Štubik* (Ibid: 459-495).

What is truly shocking, however, are the headings of these lists. They were deliberately worded so that the brief texts beneath them—some typewritten, others handwritten—appeared to be petitions, or rather desperate appeals, from the signatory Vlachs to General Antonescu, urging him to invade eastern Serbia with the Romanian Army, "liberate" the local Romanians from Serbian rule, and annex the territory to "Mother Romania." Unlike the earlier "Furnică affair" at the Paris Peace Conference, where Furnică could produce no evidence whatsoever that he legitimately represented the Vlachs, this time the Romanian military authorities were presented, as if on a silver platter, with thousands of authentic signatures—many even certified by thumbprints—as "proof" that the "true" will of the Vlachs of eastern Serbia was for their territory to be annexed to Romania.

All of these introductory texts resemble one another almost word for word. Even the editor of the collection, Ţurlea, acknowledges this at one point: *"Textele semănau, fără a fi identice,"* that is, "The texts were similar, though not identical" (Ibid: 83). In fact, they were not written by the same hand, but they had obviously originated from the same mind and followed the same pattern. After expressing sorrow at their departure and profound gratitude for the unforgettable hospitality they had received, the "Timok men" appealed to General Antonescu to "liberate" them with the Romanian Army and unite them with "Mother Romania." For example, the concluding paragraph of the appeal attached to the Curcani camp list reads: "*Rugăm Guvernul român să ne asigure şi pe mai departe libertatea şi s'o dea ţinutului nostru, luându-ne sub aripa sa şi trimiţând armata română să ne dea linişte şi viaţă românească*" ("We ask the Romanian Government to continue safeguarding our freedom and to extend that freedom to our homeland by taking us under its protection and sending the Romanian Army to bring us peace and a Romanian way of life.") (Ibid: 449). The appeal signed by the prisoners from *Remetea* concludes with the wish: "*să ne vediem odată ăn pola ţări nostre, ăn pola maici nostri Rumănia Mare*" ("May we finally find ourselves under the protection of our own land, beneath the sheltering wing of our mother, Greater Romania", ibid: 393). The text accompanying the list from the *Odaia* camp—where, it should be recalled, there was also a large number of Serbian soldiers—was typewritten and ended with the sentence: "*Vrem libertate, Domnule General, şi vrem si ne aduceţi şi pe noi şi morţii noştrii la pământul scump al Patriei române*" ("We want freedom, Mr. General, and we ask you to reunite both us and our departed ancestors with the sacred soil of our Romanian homeland", ibid: 459). Let us also mention the "appeal" from a camp whose name is not given in the document (we assume it was located somewhere in Oltenia), although its list contains the names of 180 soldiers, most of them from the villages of the Negotin and Kladovo regions. In this "appeal," the "signatories" complain to the Romanian leader that for "a hundred years they had neither schools nor churches in their own language, but only in Serbian," and that their "language, costume, and customs" were the same as those of their *fraţi nostri Olteni* ("our Oltenian brothers"). They go on to express the wish "*că odată cu noi să meargă armata română pentru că întreg ţinutul Timoc să fie alipit la Patria mamă*" ("that the Romanian Army should march together with us and annex the whole Timok region to the Motherland", ibid: 335). Finally, let us mention the list of prisoners of war from the Yugoslav Banat, where, in all probability, the initiative to extract Yugoslav soldiers of Romanian nationality from German prisoner-of-war camps and transfer them to camps on Romanian territory had originally been conceived.[69] They, too, openly "wrote" that they wished to be reunited with their "sacred Homeland" and to live together with their brethren there (Ţurlea 2012: 445).

This obviously cunningly conceived military operation could not have been carried out without collaborators among the Vlachs "on the ground," and the documents show that the key figure was the Orthodox priest Suvejkić from Grabovica, whose closest associate was a Serb named Vasa Bajić. Božidar Blagojević of Negotin has published an extensive collection of archival documents relating to Suvejkić's activities in eastern Serbia (Blagojević 2006). These revealing documents show that Suvejkić devoted considerable effort to obtaining as many written endorsements as possible confirming that the Vlachs, through their representatives in the local governing bodies of the Krajina, Timok, Požarevac, and Morava districts, had "appointed" him as their delegate to the Romanian Government. The-

69) Ţurlea reports that Colonel Balaşu, the Romanian military attaché in Belgrade, acting with the permission of the German Military Commander in occupied Serbia, General Foerster, inspected twelve prisoner-of-war camps, identified those of "Romanian ethnic origin"—that is, the Vlachs—and secured their release. "I regarded the question of prisoners of war of Romanian ethnic origin," the colonel reported on 2 June 1941, "as a matter of great importance to the state, and I sought to awaken in them the national consciousness that had been lost during unfavorable times." (Ţurlea 2012: 78).

se endorsements were followed by what was presented as an official request from those bodies: "*We request and authorize him to intervene with the esteemed Romanian Government and ask that the Romanian Army come to this district—or county—to secure our freedom and unite us with We request and authorize him to intervene with the esteemed Romanian Government and ask that the Romanian Army come to this district—or county—to secure our freedom and annex us to Romania.*" (Ibid: 164).

The Failed Military Incursion and the Collapse of Romanian Irredentism

Believing that everything had been carefully arranged and fully prepared, the Romanian authorities loaded an infantry regiment onto three vessels at Orşova shortly before midnight on 10 September 1941 and set out across the Danube toward Tekija on the Serbian bank. Fortunately, their attempt to land on Serbian soil was prevented by German border troops. A report submitted by the District Authority of Ključ to the State Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior in Belgrade stated, among other things: "*According to information verified by Gendarmerie Sergeant Stevan I. Glodić, former commander of the Tekija Gendarmerie Station, who is presently serving at the Gendarmerie Station in Kladovo, the purpose of the Romanian military crossing was to occupy those areas of Serbian territory inhabited by the Romanian (Vlach) population*" (Ibid: 195).

The failed landing proved to be the decisive turning point, after which the entire operation went into rapid collapse. The analysis subsequently prepared by the competent Serbian authorities reached the following conclusion:

> *"The principal architect of this political and propaganda campaign to create a 'Romanian minority' in our country was Mihai Antonescu, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He convinced Marshal Antonescu that the question of the 'Romanian minority' in Serbia had, in light of the events of the previous year, fully matured and that the Romanian movement throughout the Timok Krajina would gain such momentum that the issue could be resolved simply by means of an appeal from 'our Romanians' to the Romanian Government requesting the annexation of these territories to Romania. The Romanian Foreign Minister based Romania's political calculations and reasons of state on our nation's misfortune. If Serbia were to be partitioned, it was argued in Bucharest, why should Romania not gather together 'its Romanians' from our territory? As Germany's ally, Romania would in no circumstances allow the region to which it laid claim to fall into the hands of either the Bulgarians or the Hungarians"* (Ibid: 208).

Apparently, Antonescu was not fully informed of what was actually taking place, and it is quite possible that his generals misled him into believing that the military operation had been properly prepared. Otherwise, he would hardly have allowed himself to be, as the Serbian analysts put it, "led by the nose" by a foreign minister and a Serbian priest. On the other hand, a deterioration in relations with Serbia was by no means in his interest. He maintained "friendly relations with Nedić's government" because Romania needed an ally in its conflict of interests with Hungary and Bulgaria (Ibidem), nor would he have wished to antagonize the Germans by challenging their exclusive control over the Đerdap Gorge and the Bor copper mine.[70)] Moreover, when Romania joined the Tripartite Pact, it had made no territorial claims whatsoever against Serbia.

On the other hand, the indoctrination of the Vlach prisoners lasted only until they crossed the Danube on their way back to Serbia. Once on the Serbian bank, they threw away

70) The extraordinary importance of the Bor copper mine to Hitler is evident from his "First Directive on the Partition of Yugoslavia," drafted on 17 April 1941 at the Wehrmacht High Command in preparation for consultations on the subject at the German Foreign Ministry. The entire partition of Yugoslavia was set out in eight points. Point Four explicitly referred to the "Bor copper mining district," where "German military administration under the supreme command of the Army should above all be established" (Miletić 1987: 784). Historians have therefore rightly observed that the Germans "insisted on exercising exclusive authority in Serbia—particularly in Bor and the Đerdap region—and were unwilling to make any concessions to their allies." (Petrović D. 1983: 27).

all the "decorations" with which the Romanians had adorned them. In some places, however, the returning prisoners were welcomed with songs and celebrations. In the village of Radujevac, for example, they danced in a *kolo*, still wearing ribbons in the Romanian tricolor "on their arms and across their chests," while cheering Antonescu and Father Suvejkić in gratitude for their release. The spectacle so disgusted the local parish priest that he recorded in the chronicle of the Radujevac church that it was "a lamentable picture of our national consciousness" (Popović M. 2012: 278).

The Consequences of Romanian Irredentism

In short, the consequences were exactly the opposite of what had been expected. Rather than bringing the Vlachs closer to Romania, the entire episode drove them even further away from it. Worse still, it thoroughly compromised them in the eyes of the Serbian authorities. Let us first examine how the government of the time viewed the irredentist affair.

> *"Romania's claims concerning the 'Romanian minority' in our country extend over the entire Timok region and part of the Požarevac District, as far as Svilajnac. The newspaper Nadežda clearly reveals the remarkably low level at which this propaganda was conducted. Indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise, since it was aimed at a semi-literate population that spoke neither Serbian nor Romanian well, and among whom Romanian patriotic feeling and the desire for union with Romania first had to be awakened. ... Despite these facts, however, Romanian propaganda has not been completely eradicated. It continues to smolder and could easily flare up again one day in the event of some national misfortune befalling our country. In my opinion, it should not merely be kept under strict surveillance; measures should also be taken to eliminate it completely and permanently, so that the question of the Romanian minority may be settled once and for all on our territory"* (Blagojević 2006: 209).

This passage from the report prepared on 14 August 1942 by *Živojin Ranković*, State Propaganda Officer, shows that the authorities' principal concern was to prevent the Vlachs from acquiring the status of a Romanian national minority. Such a concern was understandable, since that status would have given all of their future claims and activities considerably greater political weight. Equally striking is the author's somewhat malicious assertion that Romanian propaganda had failed because it had been directed at a "semi-literate population." Most revealing of all, however, is his call for "*the question of the Romanian minority to be settled once and for all on our territory*," a statement that clearly illustrates the political climate in which the Vlachs lived at the beginning of the Second World War and how remote they were from achieving any form of minority status.

An Ingrained Fear of Romania

The Vlachs themselves lived in their villages, which were socially autarkic and remarkably homogeneous. As a rule, any Vlach who distinguished himself through education or material success became a townsman and was eventually absorbed into the Serbian urban elite. Raised on family traditions about the "wicked boyars" and the "cruel ciocoi," whose oppression had driven their ancestors to flee from *Rumînjija*—their name for the Principality of Wallachia—the Vlachs gradually developed a deeply ingrained fear of boyar Romania. More precisely, they lived with a latent fear that the authorities might one day send them back to Romania, a country they knew only through memories preserved from the Phanariote era and handed down by their forebears. This fear remained palpable long after the Second World War. Communist Party activists described it as "an inherent fear of Romania" and rightly believed that it had been shaped by tradition—that is, by "those who had fled from Romania and retained the traditional belief that conditions there were extremely bad and that no one must ever return" (Gacović 2009: 119).

The approximately 4,000 young Vlachs from nearly all the Vlach villages, who had been captured by the Germans while serving in the Royal Yugoslav Army and then experienced the brief episode of confinement in Romanian prisoner-of-war camps, merely added another layer of confusion to the entire affair. If Antonescu's fascist regime expected that a few days of carefully orchestrated hospitality and propaganda in the camps would awaken their Romanian national consciousness and win them over, it had badly miscalculated. Exactly the opposite occurred: the episode only deepened the Vlachs' distance from Romania and, in the long run, even from their own ethnic identity.

The Vlachs During and After the War

A considerable number of Vlachs returning from captivity joined the Chetnik forces of Draža Mihailović, maintaining that they had sworn an oath "to the King and the Fatherland" and that such an oath had to be honored. Others chose to join the Partisans—some immediately, others at a later stage of the war.

During the National Liberation War, there was no distinct "Vlach question," as veterans of the partisan struggle later recalled in Party discussions after the war (Ibid: 137). Although the communists initially embraced Stalin's concept that the Vlachs should constitute "a nation of their own," entitled to their own schools, media, and other cultural institutions, as well as to autonomy—even the right to secede—this policy was abandoned in early 1945, when it became evident that the Vlach language was too weak to bear the burden such a project required. The newspaper *Vorba noastra*, launched to promote the Vlach language, soon turned into yet another means of ridiculing the Vlachs. At the same time, according to Communist assessments, the Vlachs themselves "feared that this might eventually lead them toward Romania," and after only a few issues the newspaper was discontinued (Ibid: 57; 137-138). According to Žarko Trailović of Rudna Glava, who served on local administrative councils after the war, elderly Vlach veterans of the Salonika Front repeatedly asked with genuine bewilderment why the authorities were offering them something that no one had requested. They openly suspected that it might be part of a plan to send them back to Romania, where, according to popular rumor, there was no private property and everyone ate from "the communal cauldron." Out of this fear, a group of Vlachs from Mosna, near Donji Milanovac, stopped the jeep that was delivering copies of the newspaper to the Poreč region and, as Žarko recalled, forced the driver to take them back to Zaječar.

As for the language itself, it was described as "very poor," possessing "perhaps no more than a thousand words," and as being "suited only to the most essential needs of everyday communication," supposedly corresponding to "the cultural level of development of that ethnic group." In linguistic matters, the Party activists also offered their own "expert" assessment, claiming that "a large number of words [in the Vlach language] are identical with Romanian, while a great many others [the Vlachs] borrowed from Serbian and adapted to their own Vlach language" (Ibid: 20). As though words were merely tools borrowed from one's neighbors and slightly reshaped to fit more comfortably in the hand.

Romanian irredentism continued to haunt the Vlachs even after the Liberation, like one of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Let the following testimony from the Krajina village of Mala Kamenica serve as evidence:

> *"In the village of Mala Kamenica, during the census, not a single inhabitant wished to be registered as a Vlach, with the exception of one woman who had immigrated from Romania about ten years earlier. The village has 292 households. Despite all the efforts of the schoolteacher conducting the census to persuade the inhabitants to register themselves as Vlachs, his attempts proved unsuccessful. The village is located in the Brza Palanka district. Among the population there exists a fear of identifying themselves as Vlachs, because they believe that, by doing so,*

they might encourage or strengthen Romania's aspirations to annex this region—something they categorically do not want. This fear probably stems, among other things, from the vivid memories they retain of the harsh life their ancestors had endured in Romania and Bulgaria" (Ibid: 52).

The real reason for this refusal becomes clear from the following statement by the lawyer Milenko Stojanović, who served as a judge in the postwar period and made this remark at a Party meeting in the 1950s devoted to the Vlach question:

"I was serving in the court at that time [1946], conducting trials, and whenever the defendant's personal details were being recorded, a Vlach would stubbornly insist that he was a Serb, while I would say, 'Write that he is a Vlach.' That was the policy of the state administration, and it was consistently enforced. It was precisely during the census and similar procedures that the strongest objections to being recorded as a Vlach arose: 'He speaks Vlach, but he is a Serb and considers himself a Serb.' It was then that I first became aware of this fear of Romania. They would say, 'You're writing down that I'm a Vlach because you want to deport me to Romania.' Apart from the Communists, I never encountered a single person who wanted to declare himself a Vlach" (Ibid: 138).

After considering these facts, it becomes easier to understand why the number of Vlachs recorded in the postwar censuses declined so dramatically. The reasons, however, were far more complex than they might appear at first glance. In addition to the fear of deportation generated by the irredentist episode, many Vlachs also developed a sense of guilt that any public assertion of their Vlach identity might contribute to the territorial dismemberment of the very state in which they had finally found existential security. During the 1950s, other socio-economic forces also emerged that profoundly transformed every aspect of Vlach life—from traditional dress and language to ethnic and national consciousness itself, insofar as such consciousness had by then taken shape. Among the most powerful of these forces was industrialization.

Industrialization as the Mortal Wound of Ethnicity

Industrialization was launched in April 1947 with the First Five-Year Plan for the postwar reconstruction of Yugoslavia. It encompassed not only the construction of roads and railways and the electrification of the country, but also a planned effort to overcome economic backwardness and bring about a broad cultural revival. Most Vlachs emerged from the war still trapped at the very bottom of the poverty scale. In many villages, several households shared a single wooden plow, while the hoe remained the principal farming implement, giving rise to what is commonly known as hoe cultivation. The first signs of change appeared among young men whose elementary education had been interrupted by the war and who were now required to attend evening classes. Through these courses they learned that newly established enterprises in the nearby towns were desperately short of labor—especially men like themselves. Most of the work was still done entirely by hand, with pickaxes and shovels, while forestry enterprises relied on axes and crosscut saws, tools these young men had handled skillfully since childhood. The education they possessed—or, more accurately, did not possess—was more than sufficient for such work.

a) "Polutani" (Industrial Workers Who Still Farmed Their Own Land)

And so it began. First, one of the bolder young men from among a circle of relatives, friends, or neighbors found employment, often only after bitter arguments with his father or grandfather. But once he brought home his first paycheck, the others quickly followed. In

the subsistence economy of those days, cash was an exceptional rarity, and a peasant could acquire it only slowly and with great difficulty.

If the workplace was nearby, they returned home after their shifts and immediately resumed whatever work awaited them on the family farm. If it was farther away, they slept in workers' barracks and came home only on weekends. Thus there emerged a distinctive new type of worker—indeed, an entirely new social category—known locally as "Polutani" (industrial workers who simultaneously remained peasant farmers).[71)]

It did not take much intelligence for these young men to realize how important a command of the Serbian language and, above all, education had become, for it was education that determined whether one would have an easier job and earn a better wage.

Thus the attitude toward schooling changed fundamentally. Schooling in Serbian, of course. Their grandfathers and fathers had regarded the school simply as an enemy that deprived the family "workshop" of one pair of working hands, whereas they saw in education the future of their sons—their only escape from poverty and every kind of hardship. When I entered the preparatory grade, the lambs I had looked after until then had to be taken over by my grandmother Stanka, a woman still in the full strength of life for every other kind of farm work. Most people believed that a girl needed no education beyond what she could learn from her grandmother, mother, and aunts. Up to the fourth grade, boys and girls somehow continued together, because the network of satellite primary schools expanded very rapidly, and parents living within three kilometers of a school faced penalties if they failed to enroll their children. The upper grades, however, were another matter. The full eight-year primary school was usually located only in a larger village, or in a neighboring village serving several surrounding communities. In the scattered mountain settlements, this meant that a great many children remained beyond the reach of an eight-year school. If a boy occasionally undertook the long daily walk, encouraged by his father, who already covered the same distance every day on his way to work, that road was effectively closed to girls simply because they had been born girls.

The first generation of "Polutani" remained in that dual status until retirement. Their children, however, most of whom had completed vocational training, increasingly chose a different path. Unless they built new houses on their fathers' land with enough space for their own families, they preferred to remain in town, living in apartments provided free of charge by their employers. In these urban households, the Vlach language was spoken less and less; and wherever the town itself did not have a Vlach majority, the language gradually disappeared from that environment forever.

b) Bilingualism, or the Language's Suicide

"Polutani" played a crucial role in the transformation of Vlach villages, for it was through them that innovations gradually entered the formerly autarkic rural world, the most significant of which was bilingualism. They opened the door to this phenomenon because, whether they wished to or not, they had to speak Serbian at work, while on the way home and at home they spoke Vlach. They became the agents of education, literacy, and cultural innovation through the medium of the Serbian language. They could see that better jobs and higher wages went to the educated, and that intelligent and well-read people, skilled in speaking at public meetings and the ever more numerous self-management assemblies, fared much better in life. It was with this generation that the parental conviction emerged: "I sent my children to school so they would not have to struggle as we did."

71) The 1953 census showed that a large proportion of miners (38.2%), as well as skilled (20.7%) and unskilled workers (12.1%), still lived in agricultural households. (Dobrivojević 2013:226).

Bilingualism arises when two people speak both languages and converse about matters for which one of those languages has no corresponding terms. This is not, as is often claimed, a consequence of the poverty of one language, nor of the backwardness or lower level of development of the people who speak it, as the late evolutionists maintained. Rather, it results from the contact and interaction of two different cultures, most often when they belong to different economic systems or have developed in different natural environments. A frequently cited example is that of the Bushmen of Africa's Kalahari Desert, who have never seen snow and therefore have no word for it in their famous "click" language, yet possess some thirty distinct click words for different kinds of sand, by which they are surrounded. The Inuit, by contrast, have virtually no need for a word meaning "sand," but possess a rich vocabulary for different kinds of snow. Our Vlach shepherds likewise have a remarkable number of special names for particular kinds of sheep. Indeed, there is hardly a fine-looking sheep whose descriptive adjective has not been transformed into a noun and become its own "personal name," one that the animal recognizes whether the shepherd shouts it in anger or murmurs it affectionately.[72)]

The matter becomes clearer if we look at why numerals were among the first elements to be "expelled" from the Vlach language at the beginning of bilingualism. The following example was recorded in the Gornji Pek region. Two elderly sisters, living in neighboring villages, met at their brother's *zavetina* celebration in the village of Jasikovo. One of them arrived late for lunch and explained: *"Mĭ-a skapat autobusu! Ĭuo am ginđit kă trĭaśe la* ***uosam****, da ĭel a trĭekut la* ***pola uosam****, pă a fuost muara să vin pi pišuare."* ("I missed the bus! I thought it came at eight o'clock, but it had passed at half past seven, so I had to come on foot.") The explanation that follows is taken from the book *The Vlachs at Sunset*.

> *For the harmonious functioning of the traditional village community, such divisions of time as "dawn," "morning," "noon," and "evening" had been sufficiently precise. The rhythm of the modern age, however, required time to be divided into hours and minutes, since people now had to observe the working hours of institutions and the exact timetables of public transport. The old economy had been based on barter, whereas the new market economy introduced money and prices calculated to the last decimal. In the bilingual speech of the Vlachs, this produced a characteristic phenomenon: Serbian numerals were inserted into the Vlach "structural framework" of the sentence. For an active bilingual speaker this presents no difficulty, since both languages are fully understood; it sounds unusual only to an outside observer unaccustomed to such speech. The Vlach language possesses everything necessary to express numerical concepts correctly, but doing so requires the effort of translation, which is unnecessary because conversations involving numbers usually take place in settings that had already become thoroughly "Serbianized"—shops, public offices, waiting rooms, bus stops, and similar environments* (Durlić 2020: 45-46).

In the example cited above, the bus, its timetable, and clock time all belong to the sphere of the state superstructure, so the speaker unconsciously "switches" to the state language in which those concepts are expressed.

Following the disappearance of numerals from everyday Vlach speech came the gradual loss of the words denoting objects that had fallen out of use. There were many such words, because industrialization rapidly transformed the material foundations of life: traditional household utensils, articles of clothing, tools, means of transport, and countless

72) To establish in the field the boundary between the pastoral Vlachs and the agricultural Vlachs, I included in my questionnaire the word *ĭernaćik* ("winter fodder"), referring to the quantity of fodder that a livestock breeder must prepare for feeding the herd throughout the winter. A pastoralist would invariably swear that even children in the cradle knew the word, whereas among agricultural Vlachs in the villages around Negotin I encountered elderly people who had never heard it, or who, at best, knew it only by hearsay or through contact with pastoral communities. Likewise, I tested the preservation of the pastoral tradition among livestock-breeding Vlachs by means of the word *bukalaře* (see the dictionary entry under this term). Any shepherd who failed to recognize the word was not questioned further about pastoralism.

other objects disappeared, to be replaced by new ones. It is difficult to estimate how rich the vocabulary of animal husbandry once was when pastoral life flourished, or how many of those terms have since faded into oblivion. Suffice it to recall the traditional loom, itself part of the pastoral economy, which consisted of more than sixty individual components. At best, their Vlach names have found their final resting place in museum catalogues—provided, of course, that a diligent curator recorded them before they vanished. In time, the Vlach language became so depleted that the Vlachs eventually stopped speaking Vlach even to their livestock—a symbolic moment that may well be regarded as the day the language itself died (Durlić 2020: 30).

The political attempt to impose a foreign language upon the unsuspecting Vlachs as a substitute for their native tongue naturally met with resistance. The language in question was Standard Romanian, which had taken shape in Romania during the century following the departure of the ancestors of today's Vlachs. During the period of so-called re-Romanization, it had diverged so far from the popular language—to which the Vlach dialects belong—that the Vlachs of eastern Serbia could no longer understand it without formal schooling. In other words, it failed to satisfy the most fundamental criterion of a "mother tongue": no Vlach mother had ever spoken it over the cradle in which her child first learned to speak. On the other hand, no vernacular language could ever have become a fully functional literary language capable of serving all the educational and cultural needs of an entire nation without undergoing substantial enrichment. It was precisely through the re-Romanization of the language that vernacular Romanian developed into the modern, powerful official language of Romania.

This, however, is by no means an exceptional case. Anyone who consults the substantial *Lexicon of Foreign Words and Expressions* by Milan Vujaklija, especially its etymological entries, and realizes how deeply those words have become woven into modern Serbian, must conclude that Serbian itself underwent an equally unavoidable process of "Romanization" in order to become fit for its modern functions. If, by some miracle, all those borrowed words were suddenly erased from Serbian, what remained would be intelligible and sufficient only for Vuk Karadžić's "swineherds and cattle-herders." Every other profession in Serbia would simply fall silent, and the country would be forced to come to a standstill and retreat to the first half of the nineteenth century.

It may, of course, be argued that the changes brought about by industrialization affected the Serbian language and traditional Serbian culture in much the same way as they affected the Vlach language. There is, however, one fundamental difference. Traditional Serbian culture has been systematically studied, thoroughly described, and documented in every conceivable form. Anyone wishing to become acquainted with it has countless opportunities to do so—not to mention the extensive amount transmitted to younger generations through the educational system. Traditional Vlach culture, by contrast, disappeared largely unknown and unstudied. The only "documentation" it left behind consisted of slanders portraying it as primitive, backward, and atavistic, while its creators were depicted as little better than uncivilized people devoid of emotion or morality. Among young Vlachs today, such portrayals have already fostered a sense of shame about their own ancestors. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Vlach teenagers now regard speaking their ancestral language as something embarrassing, and few of them any longer consider identifying themselves as Vlachs (Ibidem).

With this, the ethnic history of the Vlachs also comes to an end, for in the future they will no longer differ in any essential respect from the majority Serbian population. They will survive only in the ironic saying that the Vlachs are simply Serbs whose ancestors happened to be Romanians. *Vorbar* is dedicated to those Vlachs: to free them from any sense of shame

about their forebears, to mark the place where their ancestors created their ethnic culture, and to mark the resting place where that culture was finally laid to rest.

Assimilation Without Resistance

With the death of their language, the Vlachs lost the last remaining element of their distinctiveness—what scholars call *ethnic identity*, sometimes mistakenly prefixed with the adjective "national," although the two are fundamentally different: the former is acquired by birth, whereas the latter is shaped by the totality of a state's ideology. Other distinctive features—traditional costume, musical instruments, dances, and songs, collectively labeled folklore—continued to be "preserved" by the assimilated Vlachs as supposedly "authentic" expressions of their heritage, or, more accurately, as cultural surrogates, performed by folklore ensembles at festivals and public celebrations, thereby creating the illusion that meaningful minority rights had been achieved.

A logical question therefore arises: why did the Vlachs accept this entire process of assimilation—which, as we have seen, lasted for centuries—silently and without resistance, like a groggy boxer absorbing one blow after another without attempting to dodge them? The only possible answer seems to lie in the very definition of the concept of "national identity" as applied to the demographic entity known as a "national minority," a concept that, precisely in the case of the Vlachs, has proved to be an anachronistic relic with little relevance to the realities of human existence.

The root of the problem appears to lie in the rise of the nation-state during the nineteenth century, following the collapse of the great empires, and in the history of national minorities that began with the so-called Jewish Question at the Berlin Congress of 1878. That history clearly shows that national minorities can neither live nor survive unless they are sustained by the state regarded as their "mother country," which does so in the constant hope that one day an opportunity will arise to annex the territory inhabited by its minority. We have already seen that such territorial ambition is known as irredentism.

In reality, every national minority is a hot potato for the state in which it lives. The state seeks to "cool it down" by peeling away its distinctive identity and swallowing it whole, offering, as a consolation prize, the opportunity to resemble the majority population.

Romania renounced the Vlachs in Paris, demonstrating that it was too weak a "mother country" to care for its runaway child. The Vlachs, in turn, renounced Romania, just as children turn away from a stepmother.

Instead of a Conclusion

From all of the foregoing, one conclusion inevitably follows: the thesis that ethnic origin is the necessary and lawful determinant of national consciousness and an indispensable component of national identity is unsustainable. In other words, it cannot be regarded as an almost universal law of ethnogenesis operating automatically, as every social phenomenon possessing the characteristics of a law is assumed to do. The Romanian nation itself provides a compelling example. It emerged through the Romanization of the ethnic Dacians, during which the original Dacian foundation disappeared, while the newly formed ethnos wholeheartedly embraced the Roman identity of its conquerors. This process is more convincingly explained by the workings of existential consciousness than by any other factor. The same phenomenon can be observed in our own time in the emergence of the Montenegrin, Bosniak, and formerly Muslim nations upon a Serbian ethnic foundation.

The matter becomes clearer if we imagine the structure of human identity as a three-story building. On the uppermost floor stands national consciousness, filled with the hig-

hest national symbols and patriotic emotions. On the middle floor is ethnic consciousness, composed of local cultural features ranging from dialect and customs to beliefs and oral literature. The foundation supporting both of these, however, must be existential consciousness, for without it a human being would hang suspended in empty space, swaying like a door in the wind.

From a historical perspective, the Vlachs lacked many indispensable stages that would have been necessary for the development of a Romanian national consciousness and identity. The first and most fundamental of these was unity—historical, economic, and political alike. Such unity was impossible because the Vlachs of eastern Serbia consist of two distinct groups which, owing to different historical circumstances, both inherited painful and alienated memories of the lands from which they had come. It is well known from what socio-economic environment of the Phanariote Principality of Wallachia the *Carani* Vlachs fled to save their very lives, while the Western Vlachs, predominantly Banat settlers, never even had the opportunity to develop ethnically within any kind of national homeland of their own. For centuries they had been separated from it under foreign rule, and after their migration that homeland simply disappeared from the political map. It is also frequently overlooked that these two regions did not become part of Serbia in the same way or at the same time following liberation from Ottoman rule. Whereas the Vlachs of Pomoravlje, Stig, Braničevo, Homolje, Zvižd, and even Poreč, as inhabitants of the Belgrade Pashalik, shared from the outset the destiny of Karađorđe's and later Miloš's Serbia, having settled there as early as the 1720s, the regions of Ključ, Krajina, Timok, and Crna Reka entered Serbia a full century later, in 1833, as the result of a series of military and diplomatic achievements by Prince Miloš, founded upon the historical rights won by Karađorđe during the First Serbian Uprising.

Economic unity was equally unattainable so long as the Vlachs of eastern Serbia continued to pursue the two occupations that had stood in opposition since biblical times—pastoralism and agriculture.

Territorial unity proved even more elusive. The land between the Morava and Timok rivers is so geographically diverse, fragmented, and deeply dissected that it cannot even be regarded as climatically uniform. Rather, it consists of a number of distinct regional landscapes within which alone the process of cultural integration could operate. Eastern Serbia came to be settled by the Vlachs solely because, along its entire breadth, it adjoins the Romanian frontier, where the previously discussed law of the border operates with the force of a natural law. The cultural convergence occurring within these regional landscapes forms the basis of the *linguistic geography* upon which the methodology of *Vorbar* is founded (see Microregional Map No. 4). At the same time, one can discern another regularity: migration tended to follow the principle of economic continuity, allowing settlers to continue in their new homeland the same occupation they had practiced in the old. Thus, farmers from Little Wallachia settled in Ključ, Krajina, and Timok—the continuation of the Wallachian Plain, artificially divided into two parts only by the Danube. Shepherds from the Almăj Depression in Banat moved with their flocks to the geographically similar depressions of Zvižd and Homolje, while miners from the Banat mining districts found refuge in Majdanpek, whose geomorphological features resemble those mining settlements almost as one egg resembles another.

Nor could the Vlachs ever achieve political unity, for the territory between the Morava and Timok rivers had never constituted a single administrative unit. Even if it had, such unity could only have been created by an intellectual elite capable of reflecting upon reality and formulating long-term strategic goals for the development of its people. Yet whenever such individuals did emerge, they were quickly absorbed into the Serbian elite, within whi-

ch they fulfilled themselves as politicians, artists, scholars, or cultural figures. The most striking examples are the leading Cincars (Aromanians), whose contributions left a profound mark on the development of the Serbian nation and state: Pašić in politics; Zmaj, Nušić, and Sterija in literature; Captain Miša in commerce and philanthropy; Pupin in science; and many others. Whether any of them ever acted anywhere in the interests of their own ethnic community remains unknown.

There were likewise no real opportunities to improve the Vlachs' perception of their supposed "mother country," Romania. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia offered little scope for either private or organized travel across the border, and when cross-border cooperation programs were eventually introduced during Tito's era, Romania lagged behind Yugoslavia in virtually every respect and could hardly serve as an attractive model. Thus the Vlachs of eastern Serbia were left without even the slightest opportunity to develop a Romanian national consciousness, however rudimentary. National consciousness must first and foremost be a treasury of knowledge about the people whose name one bears, woven together with the highest emotions—above all patriotic feelings—toward that people, its history, and its culture. None of these elements exists in the consciousness of the Vlachs where Romania is concerned. For that reason they cannot today, in the Serbian language, properly be called Romanians, for such a designation would constitute a falsification in every respect. As has already been shown, among the Vlachs the Romanian folk elements survived only within the middle level of the previously described three-tier structure of identity, and even there they are gradually disappearing under the impact of acculturation. Since the national consciousness of the Vlachs today is entirely Serbian, this unique condition can be described by only one appropriate term: *a dual national identity*. For the same reason, the hybrid designation *Romanian-Vlach*, whether written with or without a hyphen, is equally unacceptable, since it implies that the two ethnonyms are identical in meaning and interchangeable—something which, in light of everything presented here, is likewise a historical falsehood.

The Vlachs also expose the failure of Serbian scholarship. Serbian ethnology, in particular, behaved as though afflicted with night blindness whenever the Vlachs were concerned. The extent to which it failed to perceive them in their true light is perhaps best illustrated by its ethnogenetic invention of the 1970s, which reduced the Vlachs to nothing more than "a speech group," thereby merely adding another entry to the vocabulary of Tihomir R. Đorđević. In other words, throughout the three centuries of their history in eastern Serbia, during which they lived as the country's oldest yet unrecognized national minority, the Vlachs had no real opportunity to resist assimilation. Nor, from their own point of view, did they have any reason to do so.

And so, at the end of their ethnic history, as at the end of a long journey, they accepted assimilation just as a wise person accepts old age—and death.

Vorbar—a unique work comprising six thousand lexical entries, illustrated by eleven thousand phrases drawn from a dying language and containing more than one hundred thousand words in their various grammatical forms—was written so that the memory of the Vlachs may endure after their language has fallen silent.

Pančevo, Serbia
25 May 2023

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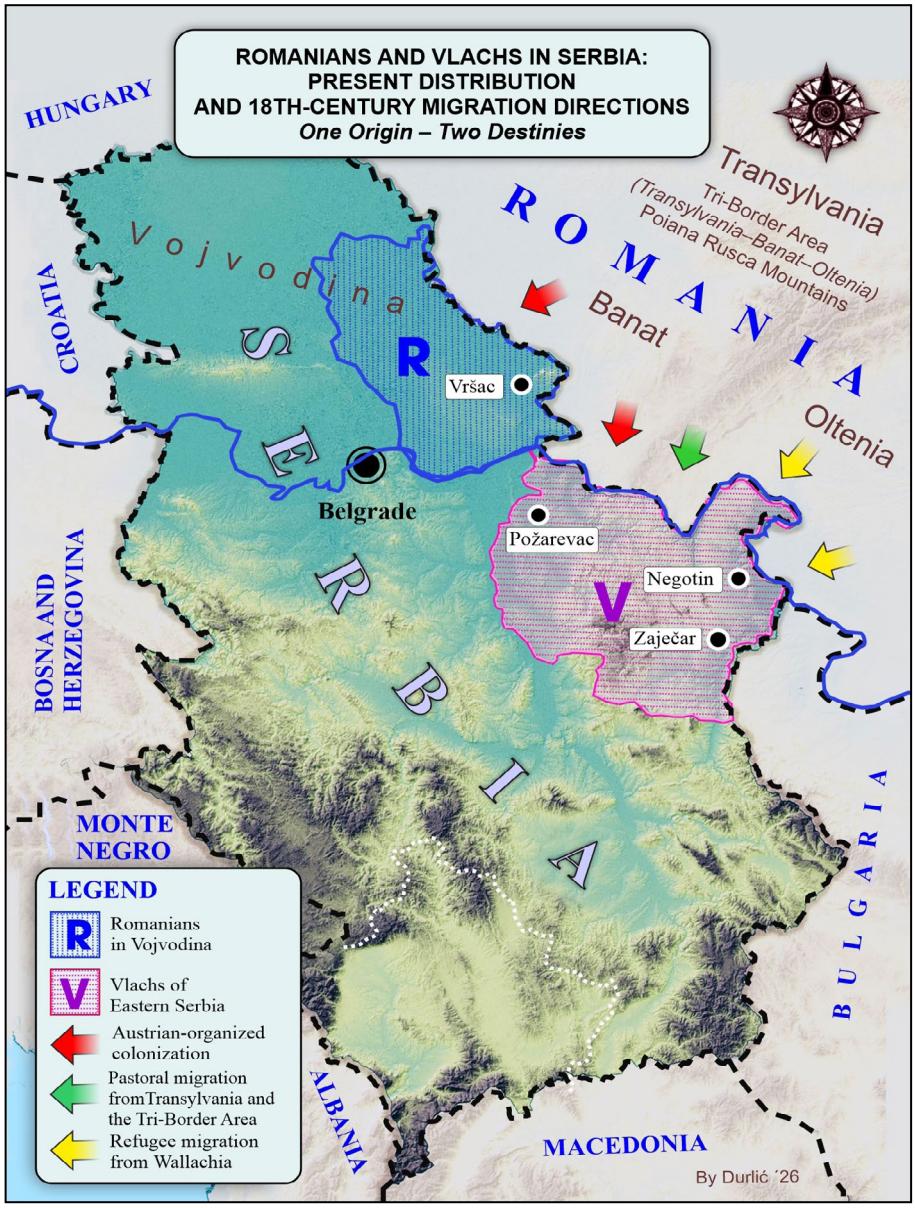
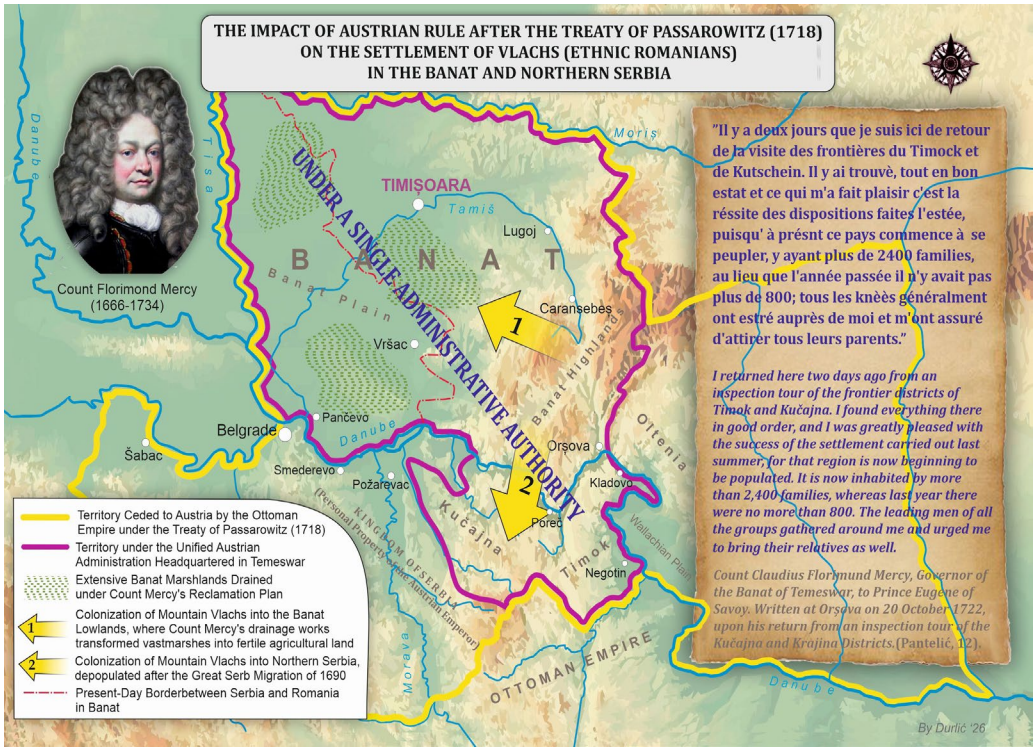
Appendix



Map 1. Romanian and Vlach Minorities in Serbia Today

Although they share the same ethnic origin, having descended from the neighbouring Romanian people, the Romanian and Vlach communities in present-day Serbia exist as two distinct national minorities. The reason for this is not a difference in origin, but the fact that, from their settlement in the eighteenth century to the present day, they have not experienced the same socio-historical circumstances. They therefore constitute a striking example of the decisive influence of political factors on the formation of national identity. Thanks to the rudimentary minority rights they acquired as early as the period of Maria Theresa's "Enlightened Absolutism", and later through international treaties regulating their status, the Romanians obtained recognition as a Romanian national minority. The Vlachs, for various reasons, remained outside such political and international processes and today find themselves in the final stage of Serbianization, occupying the paradoxical position of a "minority without a mother country"—a status that has come to be accepted alike by Serbia, Romania, the international community, and, perhaps most tragically, by the Vlachs themselves.


THE IMPACT OF AUSTRIAN RULE AFTER THE TREATY OF PASSAROWITZ (1718)
ON THE SETTLEMENT OF VLACHS (ETHNIC ROMANIANS)
IN THE BANAT AND NORTHERN SERBIA
Count Florimond Mercy
(1666-1734)
"Il y a deux jours que je suis ici de retour de la visite des frontières du Timock et de Kutschein. Il y ai trouvè, tout en bon estat et ce qui m'a fait plaisir c'est la réssite des dispositions faites l'estée, puisqu' à présnt ce pays commence à se peupler, y ayant plus de 2400 families, au lieu que l'année passée il n'y avait pas plus de 800; tous les knèès généralment ont estré auprès de moi et m'ont assuré d'attirer tous leurs parents."
I returned here two days ago from an inspection tour of the frontier districts of Timok and Kučajna. I found everything there in good order, and I was greatly pleased with the success of the settlement carried out last summer, for that region is now beginning to be populated. It is now inhabited by more than 2,400 families, whereas last year there were no more than 800. The leading men of all the groups gathered around me and urged me to bring their relatives as well.
Count Claudius Florimund Mercy, Governor of the Banat of Temeswar, to Prince Eugene of Savoy. Written at Orsova on 20 October 1722, upon his return from an inspection tour of the Kučajna and Krajina Districts.(Pantelić, 12).
UNDER A SINGLE ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY
BANAT
TIMIŞOARA
Lugoj
Caransebes
Vršac
Pančevo
Belgrade
Šabac
Smederevo
Požarevac
Orşova
Kladovo
Poreč
Negotin
Banat Plain
Banat Highland
Oltenia
Wallachian Plain
Kučajna
Timok
Morava
Tisa
Danube
Moriş
Tamiš
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
KINGDOM OF SERBIA (Personal Property of the Austrian Emperor)
Territory Ceded to Austria by the Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718)
Territory under the Unified Austrian Administration Headquartered in Temeswar
Extensive Banat Marshlands Drained under Count Mercy's Reclamation Plan
Colonization of Mountain Vlachs into the Banat Lowlands, where Count Mercy's drainage works transformed vastmarshes into fertile agricultural land
Colonization of Mountain Vlachs into Northern Serbia, depopulated after the Great Serb Migration of 1690
Present-Day Borderbetween Serbia and Romania in Banat
By Durlić '26

Map 2. Austrian Occupation (1718–1739)

After the Great Migration of 1690, Serbia was left almost deserted. Under the leadership of Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević, not only did the population of Kosovo flee, but so did the inhabitants of the northern regions of the country. Contemporary records mention refugees from Aleksinac, Niš, Paraćin, Jagodina, Zaječar, Karanovac, Kličevac, Valjevo, Grocka, Požarevac, Belgrade, and many other places (Surep 1988: 130). When one further considers that the refugees drove their livestock before them, carried their household belongings, the elderly, and children on small mountain horses, that virtually all priests abandoned their churches and monasteries, taking with them from Ravanica the relics of "the holy Tsar Lazar" (ibid., 127), while bands of marauding Ottoman soldiers followed closely behind, mercilessly slaughtering everyone they overtook, it is difficult to imagine that anyone would have dared to remain behind, except perhaps an occasional hajduk who had long been hidden in the rugged fastness of the high mountains. It was, in fact, a general panic-stricken flight, described by one contemporary witness in the following words: "the fertile and populous Serbian land was utterly laid waste; all its towns and villages were abandoned; the great imperial monasteries and splendid churches adorned with gold were deserted; the holy sanctuaries and altars where the bloodless sacrifice had once been offered are now breeding grounds for wild beasts" (ibid., 129).

An abandoned country was of no benefit to anyone, and the Ottomans tried, by various promises, to persuade the refugees to return, but without success. The first organized groups of settlers began to arrive only three decades later, after northern Serbia had come under Austrian rule and had been incorporated into the Banat. These, however, were not returning refugees, but groups drawn from the indigenous pastoral population of the Banat, whom the Viennese Court encouraged, by granting various privileges, to descend from the mountainous regions of the Banat and neighbouring Transylvania into the lowlands (Šteger 1982: 23). Owing to the extensive land reclamation carried out under Count Mercy, what had once been a desolate wilderness of marshes and swamps was transformed into one of the most fertile plains of the Austrian Empire.

At the same time, as can be seen from Count Mercy's letter of 1722 (quoted above), a number of sizeable groups from these mountain regions were also settled in the depopulated territories of northern Serbia, which at that time formed a single administrative unit with the Banat under the authority of Temeswar (Timişoara). These settlers, however, were likewise not refugees who had fled Serbia in

1690, but members of the indigenous Banat population, whom the Austrian authorities, as their own subjects, were free to relocate according to administrative needs. The importance attached to this colonisation is evident from the fact that it was personally directed by Count Mercy, commander-in-chief of the Imperial Province of the Banat and later its governor, and from the considerable privileges granted by the Austrian government to these settlers (Petrović 1897: 46–47). This is hardly surprising in view of the importance that the Viennese Court attached to its strategy of "eastward expansion."

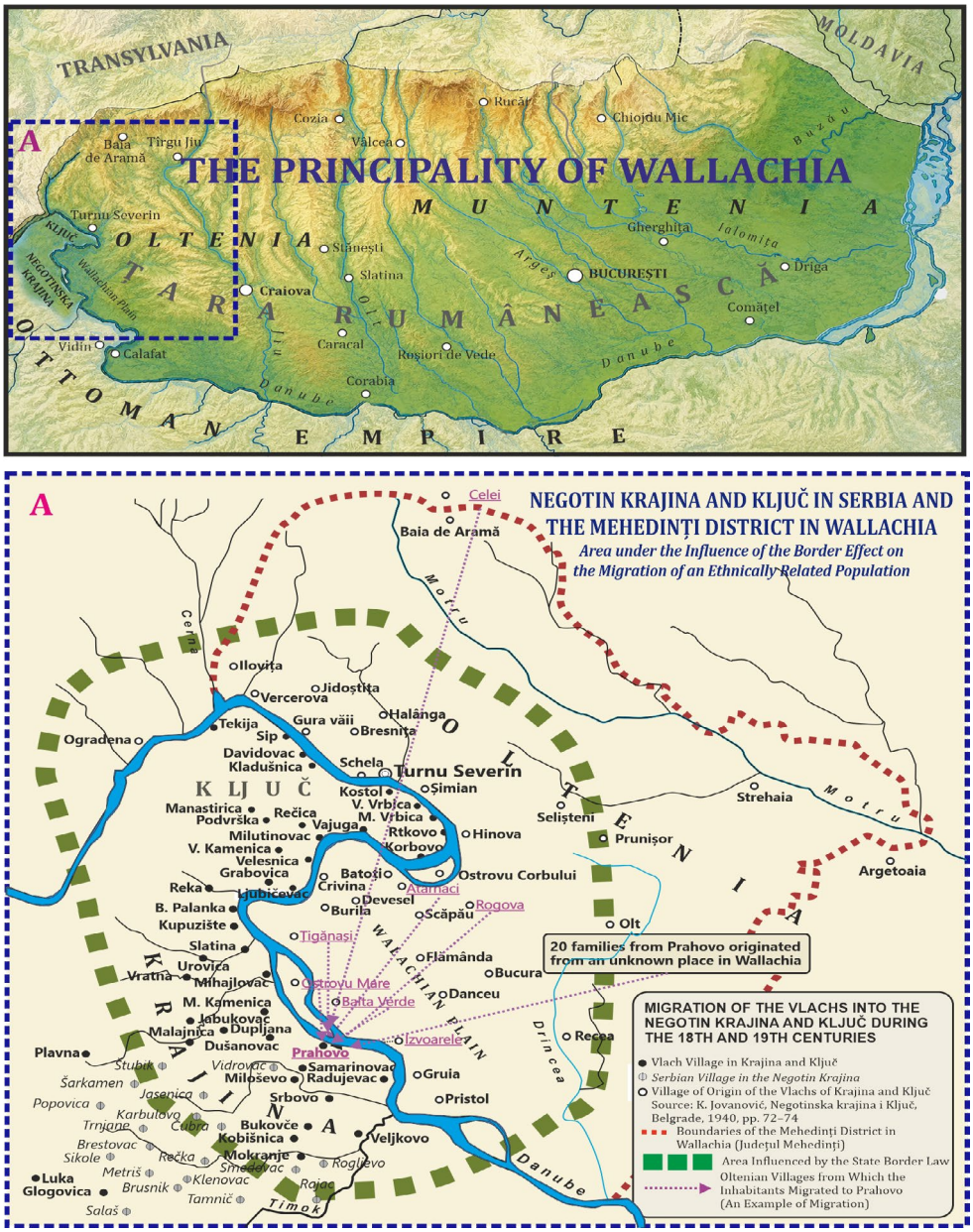
But how do we know that Count Mercy was indeed settling Vlachs, and that these people were the direct ancestors of the Vlachs who today inhabit eastern Serbia between the Morava and Timok rivers?

First, all systematic field research based on genealogical reconstruction, carried out by Cvijić's anthropogeographical school, has shown that neither the Serbs nor the Vlachs living in this region are "older" than the eighteenth century (Durlić 2023, Map 18). Moreover, every village remembered in the family traditions of the Western Vlachs as the place of origin lies precisely in the mountainous part of the Banat, a region inhabited in Mercy's time by ethnic Romanians (Šteger 1982: ibid.).

Second, among the Vlachs of eastern Serbia there long survived the memory that their ancestors had arrived during the time of "Prince Eugene" (Milićević 1876: 922). It was likewise well known in Serbian scholarly circles of the nineteenth century that they had been "settled here by the Austrian government ... according to its well-known system of colonisation" (Popović 1867: 83). However, following the pseudoscientific "turn" initiated by Tihomir R. Đorđević, who proclaimed the Vlachs to be "Romanianised Serbs," this fact was soon deliberately consigned to oblivion (Durlić 2020: 32).

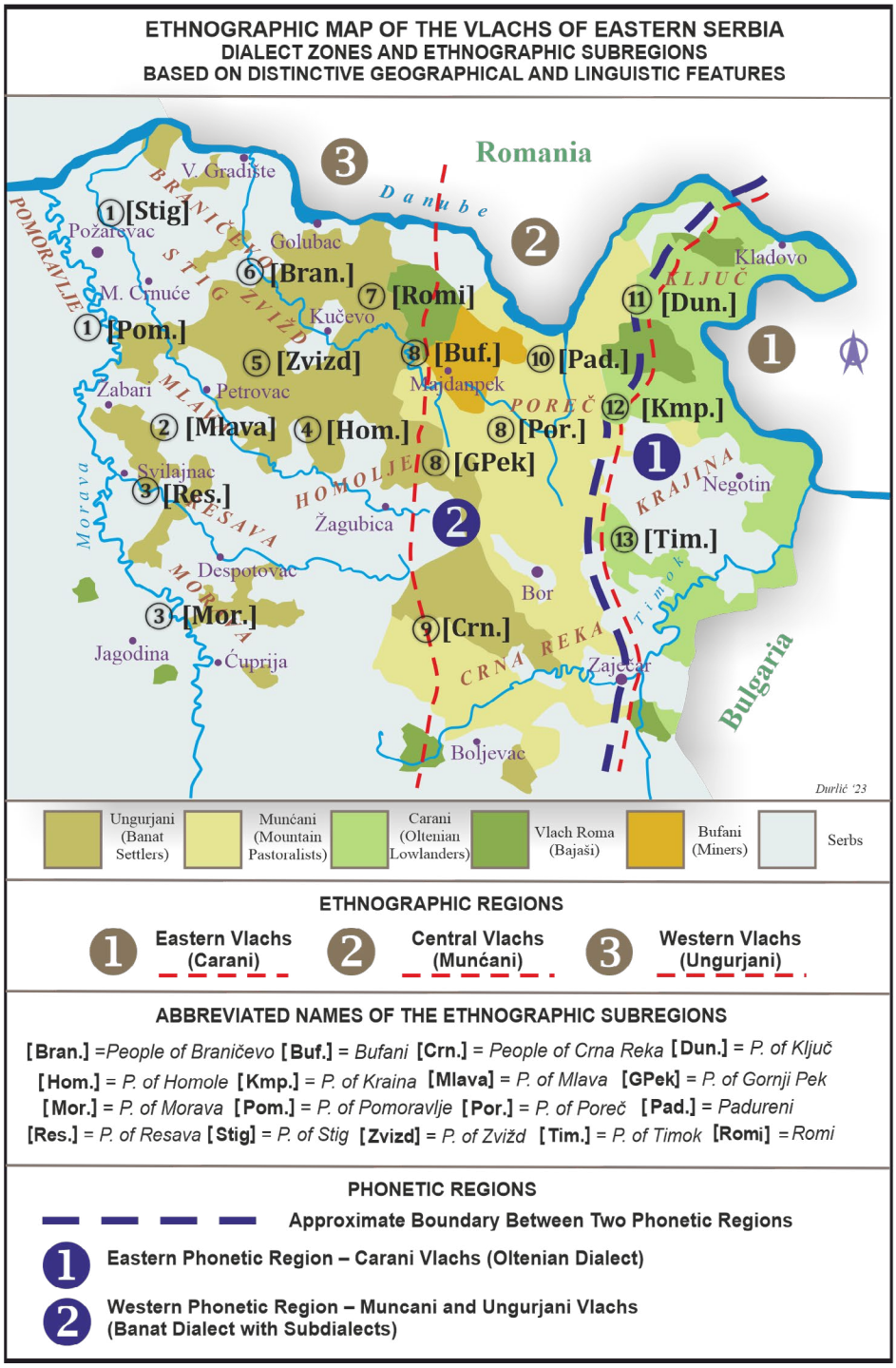
Third, had Mercy not brought these settlers in such large numbers and established them in the deserted villages, had this migration not preceded the arrival of the Serbs from the south, and had they not later been joined by refugees from the Principality of Wallachia, there might today be no Vlachs at all in eastern Serbia. At the very least, they would not exist in such numbers, nor would they occupy such an extensive territory.

The evidence presented above therefore leads to the conclusion that the autochthonist theory concerning the origin of the Vlachs and their alleged continuity in eastern Serbia since the time of Aurelian—a theory upon which the National Council of the Vlach National Minority has based its policies (and which has also been embraced by the Serbian authorities in order to prevent the "Romanianisation" of the Vlachs)—is nothing more than a lay pseudo-theory devoid of any scientific foundation (Durlić 2020: 35). Paradoxically, the practical consequence of this policy has been to accelerate the national assimilation of the Vlachs into the Serbian population and, ultimately, to hasten their disappearance from the ethnic map of Europe.



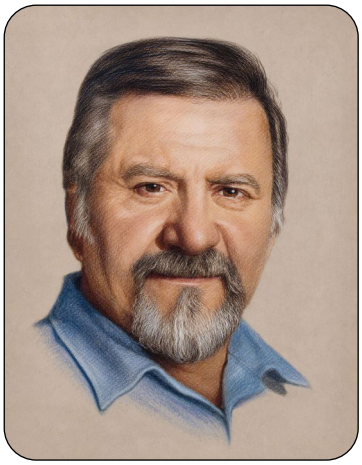
Map 3. The Influence of the Border Principle

The Vlach Plain, bisected by the Danube, which has divided one and the same people into two nations, is a textbook example of the operation of the Border Principle. A glance at the distribution and density of the Oltenian villages from which the Vlachs migrated to Krajina and Ključ reveals that they all belonged to the same geographical environment, one that fostered the same traditional occupation and way of life. For this reason, whenever conditions became unfavorable on one side of the river, they crossed to the other without difficulty. Whoever ruled Krajina readily welcomed these refugees, since uncultivated land was of no benefit to anyone. It is enough to recall that in 1833 an entire Oltenian village crossed into Serbia and founded the present-day village of Mihajlovac (Đorđević 1926: 120–141; Stanković 1983: 76–79). As examples of these migrations, the arrows indicate the Oltenian villages from which peasants fled to Prahovo, near Negotin, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where their descendants still live today. Almost every village in Krajina would display a similar "bundle" of arrows, revealing not only common ethnic origin but also close kinship ties between the Vlachs and the Romanians. This is compelling evidence that the Border Principle divides one and the same people in much the same way as brothers separate, each eventually following his own historical path.



Map 4. Ethnographic map of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paun S. Durlić Vujić, better known as Paun Es Durlić, is an ethnologist and art educator, and a retired curator of the Museum in Majdanpek. He was born on 7 September 1949 in Blizna, near Rudna Glava, and is remembered as the last Vlach whose mother gave birth to him standing up and whose umbilical cord was cut with a sickle against the wooden peg of a yoke. Throughout his childhood, until he finished secondary school, he spent his free time as a shepherd, and at the age of nine he worked as a servant at a seasonal shepherds' settlement.

He completed primary school in his native village. The only book he encountered there as required school reading was Branko Ćopić's Orlovi rano lete ("Eagles Fly Early"). Deeply impressed by it, he decided that he wanted to become a writer and, following the path of his literary idol, enrolled in the Teacher Training School in Negotin. He later studied Serbo-Croatian language and literature and graduated in Art Education from the Advanced School of Education in Belgrade in 1973. He worked as an art and music teacher in Majdanpek, Vlaole, and Rudna Glava.

In the early 1980s, having realised that teaching was not, after all, his true vocation, he enrolled in ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and joined the Majdanpek branch of the Museum of Mining and Metallurgy in Bor. He made a significant contribution to the development of this branch and to its transformation into the independent Museum in Majdanpek, which he headed for two consecutive terms.

For more than four decades, he has researched the cultural and historical heritage of Majdanpek and the surrounding regions, with a particular interest in the intangible cultural heritage of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia. He has participated in numerous national and international scholarly conferences and published more than thirty professional and academic papers in ethnology, archaeology, history, ethnomusicology, folklore studies, and folk literature, as well as three books, one of which was also published in English and Romanian.

Following his retirement, he launched the original project Vorbar: Noah's Ark of Vlach Culture on his personal website, devoted to the systematic collection, study, and public presentation of ethnolinguistic material from across Eastern Serbia.

He is the author of two award-winning ethnological films and has held the title of Instructor of Art Photography of the Yugoslav Photographic Association (FKSJ) since 1984. His other interests and activities include music, poetry, caricature, aphorisms, design, web design, and programming.

He chose ethnology because it seemed to him that only this discipline could explain the mystery of the world into which he was born. He still cherishes that illusion. He believes that poetics also has a place in the scholarly contemplation of humankind, for it can penetrate where the rational mind sometimes comes to a halt. He therefore prefers to see himself as a poet wandering through the mist of science in search of Absolute Truth, regarding it as a success if he manages to uncover even a fragment of it.

Following a family loss during the COVID-19 pandemic, he moved to Pančevo, where he continued to write in solitude.

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LEGENDA

- Village with a Vlach majority
- Vlachs and Vlach-assimilated Serbs
- Vlach village with a Roma quarter
- Mixed settlement
- Vlach Roma (Bayash)
- Village represented in Vorbar by at least one word
- VILLAGE surveyed by the author during fieldwork for Vorbar
- State border
- Main Danube crossing used by Vlachs during their 18th-century migration to Serbia

ETHNIC MAP OF THE VLACHS OF EASTERN SERBIA

Ethnic composition determined on the basis of censuses conducted between 1850 and 2011 and the author's field research carried out between 1984 and 2019. The situation at the turn of the 20th century was taken as the baseline.

M A N I A
n a t
Dunav
KLJUČ
POREČ
KRAJINA
REKA
TIMOK
Timok
LITTLE WALLACHIA
(Oltenia)
BULGARIA
Tekija
Novi Sip
Davidovac
Kladušnica
MANASTIRICA
Kostol
M. Vrbica
V. Vrbica
Podvrška
VAJUGA
Rtkovo
Rečica
Milutinovac
V. KAMENICA
KORBOVO
Velesnica
GOLUBINJE
Grabovica
LJUBIČEVAC
Reka
MIROČ
BRZA PALANKA
Kupuzište
MOSNA
Slatina
TOPOLNICA
Urovica
Mihajlovac
Vratna
KLOKOČEVAC
M. Kamenica
BLIZNA
Jabukovac
RUDNA GLAVA
Malajnica
DUPLJANE
PLAVNA
Dušanovac
PRAHOVO
CRNAJKA
Samarinovac
RADUJEVAC
GORNJANE
Miloševo
Srbovo
TANDA
1141
Bukovče
KOBIŠNICA
LUKA
MOKRANJE
TOPLA
BUČJE
Glogovica
Veljkovo
KRIVELJ
DUBOČANE
V. Jasikova
Kovilovo
M. Jasikova
Tabakovac
ALEKSANDROVAC
Oštrelj
Crnomasnica
Slatina
V. Jasenovac
BRESTOVAC
Čokonjar
M. JASENOVAC
ZLOT
Gradskovo
ŠIPIKOVO
METOVNICA
HALOVO
Nikoličevo
Savinac
GAMZIGRAD
OSNIĆ
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Grljan
VALAKONJE
Šljivar
Prlita
s. Boljevac
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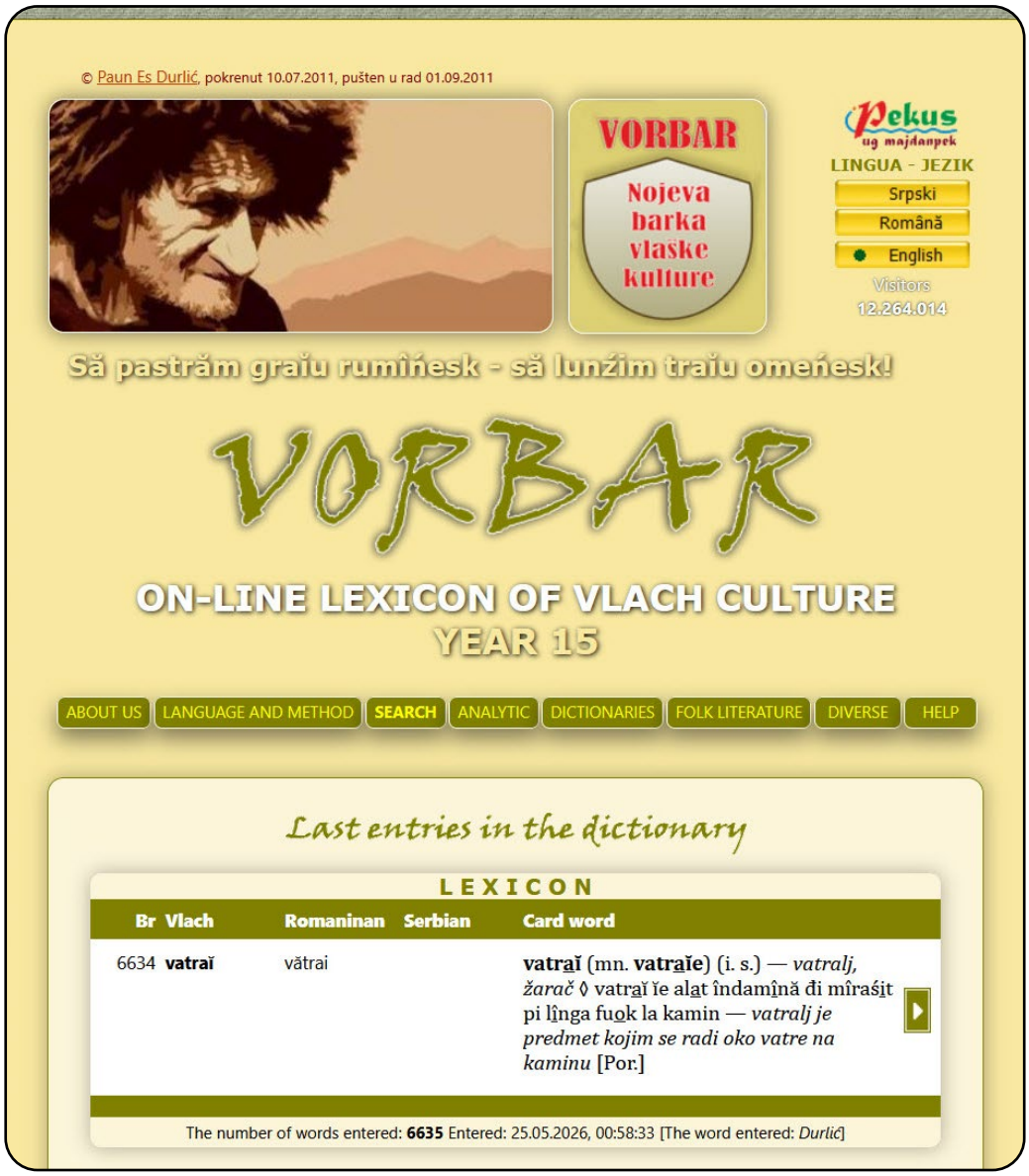

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